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THE RAIMENT OF THE SOUL

REV. HENRY HOWARD

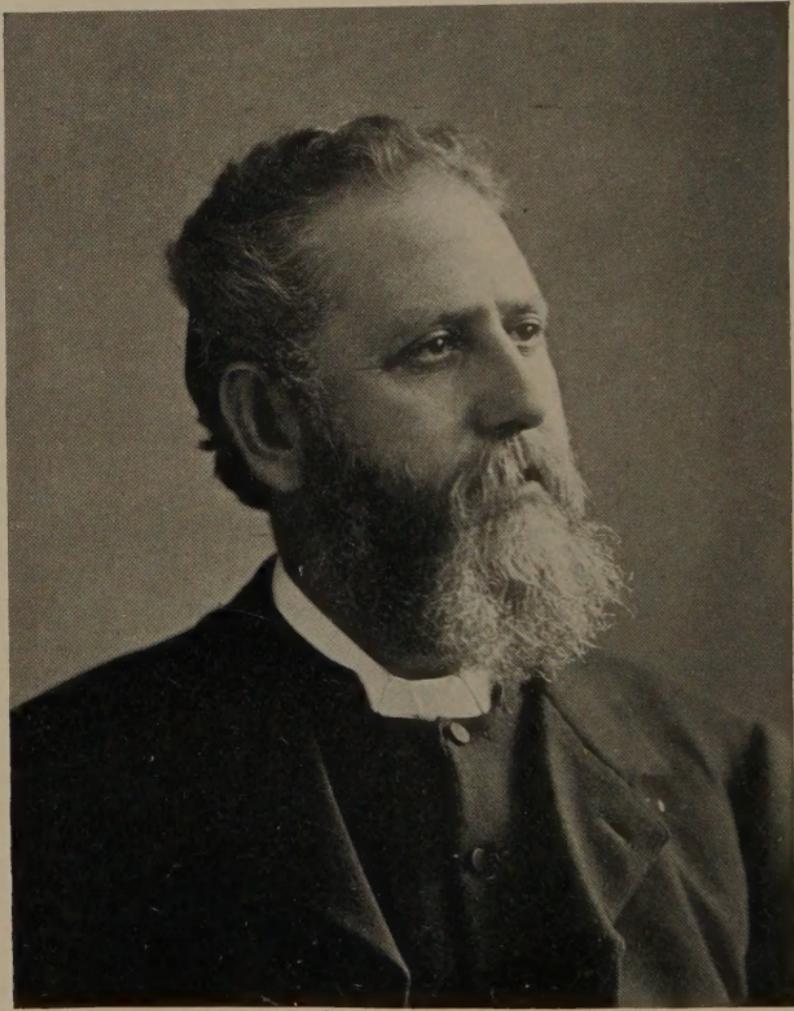


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Yours faithfully
Henry Ward Beecher

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THE RAIMENT OF THE SOUL AND OTHER STUDIES

By the
REV. HENRY HOWARD

LONDON
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Introduction

A HEARER in one of our congregations recently remarked that preaching in this country is one of the lost arts. The missing article turns up in Australia, as this specially interesting volume demonstrates. During his visit to the motherland the author has won golden opinions both as speaker and preacher, and these sermons show how legitimate his success has been. We submit that they are fine examples of true popular preaching. The themes are always high and worthy; there are no catchpenny topics or titles. His subjects are invariably the great ones which appeal to the understanding, conscience, and heart of the people.

A statesman, stepping for the moment out of his own province, reminded us that if the pulpit of our day is to attract and transform the multitude, we 'must appeal to the infinity that is in them.' It was a profoundly true and timely admonition. The preacher to whom we listen in these pages affects no trifling or sensational themes; he addresses his hearers from the highest ground, appealing

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to the soul with the noblest truths, arguments, and inspirations. How much does the popular preacher lose by selecting paltry themes and urging utilitarian motives! Here the appeal is to the spirituality, infinity, and immortality of human nature, and this is the main secret of Mr. Howard's popularity and power.

Everywhere these sermons are concerned with character. Australia is the land of social enthusiasm and of political and economical experiments ; but the whole strength of our preacher is concentrated upon bringing men to Christ and making them like Him. Sublime political conceptions and ideal social programmes are little better than illusions and mockeries whilst the animalism of our nature is dominant, its selfishness unpurged, its pride and wilfulness rampant, its materialism and ungodliness unchecked. Little can be wrought for society by the deftest scene-shifting ; until such times as human nature itself is radically better the conditions of life and society will not be greatly modified to the common advantage. Harmonious and contented collectivism is introduced through noble individualism. Pentecostal power and purity, saintly brotherhood, supreme and universal love and charity, must precede the realization of the glorious dreams of generations touching the ultimate civilization. As preachers do their work well in the creation of new men, politicians will find

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themselves easily able to fashion a new world. No greater enemy to true progress lives than the reformer who fancies that he has struck a short cut to the millennium. Mr. Howard is not insensible to social wrongs and miseries, but he aims to advance civilization through personal salvation and sanctification. He finds his texts in the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and not in another St. Marx. Such preaching as we have in these pages goes to the very roots of things, and inevitably produces happier communities and nobler nations.

This experienced preacher, familiar with human nature and its crying needs, has seen no reason to depart from the great evangelical truths which account for the origin and persistence of the Church of God. We are not here invited to witness feats of pulpit bubble-blowing; but, remembering how usually these prismatic trifles burst before the childish hand-clapping ceases, there is little cause for regret. The scientist confidently affirms that 'persistence is the sign of reality'; if, then, this is actually so, the evangelical creed undoubtedly possesses that sign. For nearly two thousand years the doctrine of sin and redemption has proved itself on men's pulses; and whilst 'new theologies' by the score have dropped into the limbo of forgetfulness, this doctrine prevails to this hour, the multitude finding in it

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peace, purity, and hope. Mr. Howard never forgets the reality of human sin and sorrow, and very skilfully does he bring home the precious truths which satisfy the conscience, comfort the contrite heart, and strengthen the will against all the pressure of life.

The style of these discourses will satisfy and delight the most fastidious, whilst its lucidity and manliness win the ear of the man in the street. The illustrations are unusually fresh and felicitous, setting forth the vital truth with great clearness and effectiveness. Mr. Howard is essentially a poet, and all readers familiar with the picturesque theology of the late Rev. Thomas Jones will recognize in these discourses similarly captivating characteristics. Exquisite and splendid comparisons will first excite envy in the breast of the preacher who reads, and then, let us hope, stir him to emulation. The fine imagery is an outstanding feature of these sermons. Yet the most poetic and skilful illustrations count for little, except as they express serious thought, and are nerved by logic. Fifty years ago a number of poets arose who were known as constituting 'the spasmodic school.' A marked feature of their muse was the richness and variety of their figures; as one of them boasted, 'Images lay thick upon our talk as shells on ocean's strand,' and the claim was just—their minstrelsy abounded in magnificent and

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charming illustration. But their poetry is now obsolete, except as it may be reproduced in 'elegant extracts,' whilst the singing of Tennyson and Browning grows upon us generation after generation because it united deep and logical thought with fine imagery. Mere rhetoric cannot succeed either in poetry or in preaching ; if the jewels of fancy and language are to remain permanently influential, they must be beaded on a golden thread of real knowledge, consecutive reasoning, and high purpose. What is merely decorative is superficial ; people are deeply moved by fine imagery only as it expresses thought, conviction, passion, and sympathy. The discourses before us are rich in figurative teaching, but it is teaching ; nothing for the sake of a clever similitude. Yet the original or brilliant image shows again and again what a precious handmaid imagination is to truth.

It is with unfeigned reluctance that we venture to write these few preliminary lines. They are quite superfluous ; but the preacher, in his modesty, thought an introduction to the British public desirable. We are sure that all who follow the living and eloquent reasonings of this volume will be entirely satisfied that the author will not need any further introduction.

W. L. WATKINSON.

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I

The Raiment of the Soul

The fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.—REV. xix. 8 (R.V.)

AMID the stately imagery of the Apocalypse, under cover of which the seer of Patmos sets forth the consummated glory of the Church of God, these words are inserted as an interpreting clause. With this interpretation and the line of thought it suggests we desire to deal. It is significant that the writer felt it necessary to make the explanation which the text contains; while the idea ~~it conveys~~—that the raiment in which the ransomed saint shall appear at the marriage supper of the Lamb will have been woven out of the deeds done in the body—imparts a new and quite transcendent value to our earthly life. It sets the vanishing present in causal relation to the eternal future, and stamps the homely duties of our common days with an incalculable worth.

When thus interpreted, our text gives a death-blow to the notion, prevalent in many minds and

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shaping many lives, that it matters not much how a man lives so long as he is repentant when he dies. As though the death-crisis were some process of moral alchemy by which the base metal of a vicious life could be changed into the gold of godly character, and the soul step out unstained upon an eternity that bears no relation to time! Let us not be deceived ; there is no such thing as jugglery here. The connexion between this life and that is severely logical. We have already determined many of its issues ; and in the light of the text it is clear that whatever raiment the soul may wear in that world will be the product of its out-working in this.

One of the sacred writers likened his days to a weaver's shuttle for swiftness. But the analogy goes deeper. What we put into the shuttle comes out in the web. If we do not want to see it there, we must not put it in here. Once we have spun the woof of our day, we cannot unspin it. It passes beyond our reach and disposal. Nor can we keep it out of the piece. There it must appear, to beautify or mar the pattern of our lives. The thread of time, as it passes into the loom of our lives, is morally colourless ; but our choices give it tone and tint and texture. They weave it into the web of a well- or ill-conditioned character, which in

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its turn becomes the determining factor of destiny. The garment with which the soul shall be girt in that life will have been evolved from our own essential being and woven by our own hands, and will not be a robe with which we shall be invested from without and by the hands of another.

This effectually disposes of another mischievous notion, that all our moral defects are in some fashion to be graciously concealed by what has been called the 'imputed righteousness of Christ.' Perhaps no doctrine has been more persistently misunderstood and misrepresented. Certainly nothing could be more morally misleading and undoing than the idea that God can in any way credit a soul for being what it never intends and is making no effort to be. The only legitimate sense in which a quality may be imputed to an individual which he does not immediately possess is that in which he is credited actually with what he holds potentially. Thus a bank-manager, simply on the strength of a farmer having sown his crop, though not a single blade may yet appear above the ground, may give him an advance upon the coming harvest; but he must first be assured that the seed has been sown. What the bank-manager does with the farmer God is prepared to do with His spiritual husbandry. For example, it is written, 'Abraham believed God, and

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it was imputed to him for righteousness.' That imputation was a prospective reckoning of a crop the seed of which had only just been sown. It was a divine forecast based upon present possibilities in Abraham's faith. That is to say, faith stands to righteousness as seed stands to harvest; and God is always prepared to credit the soul not only with its actual but with its potential wealth.

In order to clearness and brevity, let it be said first that, just as we must postulate the possession of vital force as the necessary antecedent to the exercise of vital function, so we must presuppose the possession of a righteous principle as the necessary prelude to righteous practice. Spiritual life must precede the performance of spiritual acts. But, secondly, the possession of spiritual life depends upon the exercise of a vital faith; and the faith that is at once vital and vitalizing is an act of self-surrender to the Highest—an act in which the human soul places itself in receptive relation to Jesus Christ. The soul that thus submits itself becomes presently conscious of an all-enswathing Presence, folding it round, holding it in warm and loving embrace, and laying upon it gentle yet almighty hands. The Holy Ghost comes upon that soul, the power of the Highest overshadows it, and lo! it is born of the Spirit. It is divinely fertilized. In one swift and beautiful

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moment it passes from the realms of death and thrills with new and vivid life.

Now all life with which we are familiar takes on form, builds up structure, clothes itself in raiment after its kind. Our bodies are simply the vesture which our physical life has wrought, and behind which it sits, throwing its shuttles, weaving its robe of flesh, restoring wasted tissues, repairing damage, fulfilling countless functions, and displaying manifold powers. We do not live because we have bodies ; we have bodies because we live. Organism does not create life ; life creates organism ; and the higher the scale of life the higher and more complex the organism becomes. Why in the highest life of all, the life that is spiritual and divine, should this principle desert or disappoint us? Why should not the spiritual life observe the selfsame law, and weave around itself a body fitted for its sphere? Does not the apostle say, 'There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body'? Be this as it may, it is perfectly clear from the text, as well as from the analogy of life's processes elsewhere, that although God may be said to clothe the soul in fitting raiment for the marriage supper of the Lamb, He certainly does not do it mechanically from without, but vitally from within. In other words, He clothes the soul as He clothes the grass. The beautiful and fragrant raiment with which the

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vegetable kingdom is adorned is divinely woven from within the living structure of the growth itself by the secret chemistry of life, and not laid on by mechanical processes from without.

How does God paint the crimson of the rose, the burning splendour of the poppy, the saffron of the crocus, the blue of the violet, the golden yellow of the dancing daffodil, and the homely green of the grass? Why, certainly not from without, but from within.

Have you ever carefully looked into Christ's words, 'God so clothes the grass of the field'?—not 'clothes the field with grass,' but clothes the *grass* itself! Is grass, then, ever in what may be called a naked stage? Undoubtedly. Listen to Paul, in his masterly argument for the resurrection of the dead: 'But some man will say, How are the dead raised? and with what body do they come? Thou foolish one, that which thou thyself sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not the body that shall be, but a *bare* grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other kind.'

'*Bare* grain' here is 'naked grain.' How does naked seed get clothed? In every seed is packed up a whole set of weaving machinery, distilling apparatus, and pumping-gear, together with the driving-power in the shape of vital force. As soon

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as a seed is placed under favourable conditions the latent force stirs into activity. The pumps begin to work, the shuttles begin to fly, till by subtle processes that no science can trace it weaves its raiment of green or purple or gold, in texture so exquisite in delicacy that Solomon in all his glory was but as a man girt round with sackcloth when compared with the 'splendour of the grass or the glory of the flower.'

'The grace of the fashion' of the flower, then, is only the outward manifestation of its inherent loveliness. Its raiment is simply the expression of its character. In its case clothes and character correspond. As a matter of fact, we distinguish the members of the vegetable kingdom by their clothes. How do you tell the difference between an oak and an elm, or a dahlia and a rose? Why, by their clothes! They never assume one another's raiment, nor masquerade in borrowed robes. What if in our case character and clothes were thus made suddenly to correspond? What embarrassing transformations would take place! What reversals of human judgement would transpire! Some who are meanly clad would be transfigured before us, their faces would shine like the sun, and their raiment be white as the light; while others who are attired in costly robes would be stripped of their fine apparel and clothed in filthy rags.

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The day of manifestation, however, is not yet. True, within limits, even now the earthly body is an index to the soul, and a man's dominant affection writes its signature across his face, conforming the features to the soul within. But we are skilled in disguises and deceits: we have learned so to school our features as to deceive the very elect. Like Shakespeare's Gloster :

We can smile and murder while we smile,
And cry content to that which grieves our soul,
And wet our cheek with artificial tears,
And frame our face to all occasions.

Yet there comes a day of unmasking, when what men are within they will be shown to be without by signs that will permit of no ambiguous interpretation. Upon that *dénouement* will the issues of final judgement turn, because character must ever be the determining factor of destiny. That character we are weaving now, which will be the garment of the soul through its eternal years.

In the case of the man in the Parable of the Marriage Feast it was not the mere fact of being unsuitably attired which led to his expulsion. It was the condition of character which his undress appearance revealed. The independence of spirit, the self-willed assertiveness, the contemptuous disregard of established custom, the setting at defiance

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of a recognized social code—these were the tempers and dispositions which lay behind his slovenly attire, and which that attire expressed. In a word, it was the spirit of contemptuous self-sufficiency indicated by his raiment which disqualified him from the marriage feast. Indeed, who does not feel that such a spirit would be undesirable company at such a function, and prove a note of discord at the feast of love?

On the assumption that at a royal wedding it was the Oriental custom to provide the garments for the invited guests, then clearly, to surrender personal preference and waive one's private tastes in so delicate a matter as that of dress became a fine gauge of loyalty ; while the whole-hearted acceptance of the will of the host would present a striking symbol of that social harmony of which a marriage feast is perhaps the highest earthly expression. That the explanation of the parable must be sought along these lines is clear from the fact that entrance into the new kingdom and status therein can never be made to turn upon mere clothes, but upon character; not upon accidentals of outward condition, but on the essential elements of the inner man ; and thus the parable accords with the teaching of the text.

The text also disposes of another mistaken notion,

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viz. that the future life will be totally dissimilar and distinct from this. On the contrary, the soul will carry with it into that life the habiliments it has created for itself in this. Its habits, in the sense of behaviour, here, will become its habit, in the sense of costume, there. The possibility of a wedding garment has been placed within easy reach of all by the royal grace of the King. That possibility lies in the acceptance of His will as the rule of our life. Immediately upon its acceptance that will becomes within us the force of a new life-principle, conforming us to the mind of God, and forthwith assimilating to itself a body after its kind. Behind this veil of flesh sits this mysterious principle, throwing its invisible shuttles, and investing the soul with the garments in which it must finally stand in the bridal-hall of the King.

You will observe that this weaving process commences here, this life supplying the raw material for weaving the texture of our wedding robe. It is the righteous *acts* of the saints. The faithful discharge of homely duties—the application of great principles to small details—will gird the soul with beauty for its heavenly home. Does it seem incredible to you that, out of such commonplace material as your humdrum life supplies, such wondrous raiment can be wrought as shall

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make you meet to sit with Jesus' priests and kings? Then back to your gardens again, and see how from commonplace earth and water, light and air, such marvels of grace and beauty are evolved. Only let the vital principle touch these elements, and at once they are transfigured. Whatever life touches it transforms. But the touch must be vital, and not merely mechanical. This distinction measures the whole distance between internal and external righteousness.

Organic chemistry furnishes a beautiful yet startling illustration of this ultimate and irreducible distinction between the product of vital force and that of scientific skill. It will be generally known that many substances which were once derivable only from living products can now be synthetically produced in the laboratory, and without any recourse to the kingdoms of life. For example, tartaric acid, for which we were once dependent entirely on the juice of the grape or other fruits, can now be compounded from elements not even remotely related to the vine or any other plant. These elements, by a synthetic process, may be so united by the chemist as to form what is known as 'meso-tartaric' acid, which is apparently indistinguishable from the tartaric acid the product of vital force. It looks the same; it tastes the same; it performs

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the same industrial functions; it behaves the same under the most rigid tests of chemical reaction. Yet, in spite of all these identities, there remains one final scrutiny it cannot survive, and which separates it by an impassable gulf from the vital product: this is the test of *polarized light*. It passes unchallenged till it reaches this judgement-seat. Then the fatal distinction is disclosed which places it unerringly on the left side of the judge. From this point the two products, which might have been classified together, must be placed in different categories; for while the acid which is the fruit of a vital process shows itself in the revealing ray to be '*optically active*' by rotating the plane of polarized light, the merely synthetic product of the laboratory stands revealed as '*optically inactive*' and totally destitute of rotating power. According to Van't Hoff, the highest living authority in this department of chemical science, this impotence is inherent and inseparable from the synthetic preparation, being due to the 'configuration of the two asymmetric carbon atoms in space.' In this case, then, science, though she may closely resemble, cannot exactly reproduce the life-product, and her failure is made manifest in the judgement-day of polarized light.

So is it in the sphere of human deeds. The spiritual

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and the unspiritual man may each perform acts of beneficence or devotion, which to all outward seeming may be identical, yet as to motive and moral quality may be as widely differentiated as the living from the dead. Measured by any merely human standard they may be utterly indistinguishable. They may equally survive the scrutiny of the most critical and even cynical tests, and be equally attended with 'tumult of acclaim.' But there is one supreme test that will yet pierce through all similitudes and lay the secret and essential difference bare. In the searching radiance of that fierce light which will be made to beat upon all the deeds of time, 'the righteous acts of the saints' will appear vivid with the spiritual life of which they are the product and expression; while all mere external performances, all semblances of piety which have posed and passed as genuine charities of life while the heart was destitute of love, will in the searchlight of that final scrutiny be seen and judged and declared before all worlds to be the dead things that they are.

In this regard our righteousness must exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees—in its vitality. It is not a question of quantity, but of quality. The righteousness of faith is inward, and for ever working outward in 'loveliness of

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perfect deeds': that of the law is merely outward, and bears no more necessary or vital relation to a man's character than his glove does to his hand. One is distilled by vital processes from a divinely fertilized soul; the other is fastened on mechanically from without, like the fruit of a Christmas-tree. Indeed, a Christmas-tree, with its heterogeneous display of sweets, tin trumpets, and wax dolls, affords a good illustration of mere external righteousness. No one, not even the little child who awaits the plucking of a prize-packet from its branches, is deceived into thinking that it grew there; and the common fate of the Christmas-tree when stripped of its unnatural fruit is at least suggestive of the doom which awaits the character whose inner and outer life have failed to correspond.

The 'righteous acts' of the saints, then, derive all their value and significance from the fact that they are the product of life. They stand in vital relation to inner character, of which they are the flower and fruit, and, being partakers of its vitality, are literally 'living works,' having seed in themselves after their kind.

Life alone can produce life. Any so-called good work which does not spring from spiritual life, however similar in appearance to the vital product, must be classified as a 'dead work.' A common

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garden-pump can elevate a bucket of water for you, but it is a bucket of water still, for the process is purely mechanical: yet let your rose-bush pump up a bucket of water, and, because the process is vital, it is transformed into fragrant petals of crimson or gold; let your grape-vine pump up a bucket of water, and lo! the miracle of Cana is repeated, and the water is turned into wine.

Now if such marvellous transformations as these can be effected within the limits of mere physical life, who will dare to set limits to the spiritual possibilities enfolded in the new-born soul? Has it not been born again for deathless being? and, with eternal life, shall there not be eternal development and ever-growing similarity to God? Our text represents these possibilities as having become actual, the life-principle in the case of the redeemed soul having woven about it a texture after its kind, through which it manifests its beauty and displays its power. The deeds done in the body at the impulse of the spiritual life become thus the spirit's mode of embodiment and self-manifestation. Thus, by a fine figure of speech, the moral effluence or output of the soul becomes its raiment of white linen pure and clean.

The supreme question for each of us is, Have we begun to live spiritually? because spiritual life

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must everywhere precede spiritual work. For this we have been called into being, for this are all the countless ministries of redemption in operation. For this Christ died and rose, for this He lives and pleads. For this He waits and woos and whispers on the threshold of every human life, that through the open door of its surrendered will He may be admitted to work the wonders of His grace.

He pierces through the sham and semblance of men's well-to-do-ness, and knows the self-deception which blinds their eyes and hardens their hearts. With matchless grace and tenderness He still stands over every morally poor and naked life, and says: 'I counsel thee to buy of Me gold refined by fire, that thou mayest become rich; and white garments, that thou mayest clothe thyself, and that the shame of thy nakedness be not made manifest.'

Many will read these words to whom the spiritual life has long been a real and blessed possession. Has that life been getting fair play? Has it been provided with ample material, in the shape of opportunity, for weaving its ascension-robe? If human souls are to continue in this state of spiritual being, and develop therein, they must act in it. Every power must be functioned or forfeited. Not to use is to lose. To place and to keep the forces of spiritual life in constant and vital contact with all

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the multiplied relations of our many-sided being, to touch everything, so to speak, with spiritual hands, and to work it to spiritual ends—this will clothe us with a beauty that no age can wither and no power destroy.

But the time is short, and there is need of diligence, lest the Bridegroom come and we be found in unreadiness for the marriage feast. We must work the works of Him that sent us with both hands, 'for the night cometh.' We must translate creed into conduct, faith into deeds, worship into work, so that, when at length the earthly house of our tabernacle shall dissolve, we may step forth, not unclothed, but in radiant garb, our souls girt about already with their house which is from heaven, and mortality swallowed up of life.

What untold possibilities of beauty and strength thus lie open to the soul that has become the seat and centre of spiritual force! We have seen what God can do with merely material elements when He touches them with His mystery of life. But if He can come to such beauty and fragrance in dead matter, what can He not do with living mind, when it works hand in hand with His purpose and becomes the obedient servant of His will? If God so clothes the perishing grass of the field, which lives but a day, how much more will He

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clothe us, His everlastings, His immortelles, with a beauty that will outshine the stars! Prostrating ourselves at His feet, let us humbly pray:

Make Thou my spirit pure and clear
As are the frosty skies,
Or this first snowdrop of the year
That in my bosom lies.

As these white robes are soil'd and dark,
To yonder shining ground ;
As this pale taper's earthly spark,
To yonder argent round,—

So shows my soul before the Lamb,
My spirit before Thee ;
So in mine earthly house I am,
To that I hope to be.

Break up the heavens, O Lord ! and far,
Thro' all yon starlight keen,
Draw me, Thy bride, a glittering star,
In raiment white and clean.

II

Missing the Mark

Let not sin reign therefore in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.—ROM. vi. 12, 13.

LET us to-day consider sin as the missing of a mark. This is the meaning of the original Hebrew and Greek words which in the Old and New Testament Scriptures have been translated 'sin.' It is a figurative and picturesque phrase, borrowed from the old-time practice of archery, and in which the missing of the target by an arrow was seized upon and employed by the sacred writers for the purpose of conveying in a striking and popular fashion the conception of sin as a misdirection, the failure of life to reach its aim, to cleave the mark of its high calling, and make the goal. A careful study of this subject has convinced the writer that the analogy goes much deeper than between the mere fact of an arrow missing the mark and a life missing its aim. Upon

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analysis it will be seen that the phrase stands not only for failure, but for all the conditions and causes which lie behind failure, and to which failure is due.

An examination into the causes which lead to the missing of a mark in the case of an archer reveals quite a cluster of startling analogies, and proves how deeply philosophical and scientifically accurate are these ancient Scripture words. The bow and arrow of ancient warfare, although long since discarded by us in favour of more precise weapons, will need no description here; but the force and significance of the phrase, 'the missing of a mark,' can be realized only as we remember that behind the misdirected arrow there is a bowstring, behind the bow-string there is a hand, behind the hand there is an eye, behind the eye there is a brain, which is the organ of mind, will, purpose, and all that we gather up under the word 'personality.' Here, then, there is a combination of causes, physical, mental, and moral, into which the line of the arrow's flight may be finally resolved.

The army rifle, however, is a much more familiar weapon to many of my readers than the bow and arrow, and for that reason alone will serve the better to illustrate to a modern mind the inseparable relation between personal character and accuracy of aim. Take, for example, the Lee-Metford or Martini-

Missing the Mark

Henry arm. This is a finely finished and highly complex weapon, composed of many parts, all co-operant to one end, viz. accuracy. For this they have been separately formed and combined, and unless this is achieved the supreme purpose is missed. But all this delicately adjusted mechanism is made in the last resort to depend for its effectiveness upon how it is handled. The precision of the weapon must be supplemented by precision on the part of the marksman. But the precision of the marksman will be found, on analysis, to involve qualities of such a kind that his score at the ranges becomes a record of personal character, a register of moral behaviour, a veritable index to his power of self-control. The writer has taken the trouble to verify his own necessarily limited experience at the butts by consulting some of the crack shots of the Empire, together with the standard army text-books as issued by the Crown. Whether we study this question theoretically by the aid of books, or practically with a rifle, we shall be led inevitably to the same conclusion—that the hitting of a mark is conditioned entirely by the marksman himself. Of course, some of my readers will say luck has a great deal to do with it. But, excuse me, there is no such thing as luck in this matter. 'Luck' is one of the most morally mischievous words

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in the language—especially when we employ it for the purpose of condoning our own failure and discounting other people's success.

At first sight, of course, it would appear as if the conditions of success in a marksman were twofold—internal or personal, and external or circumstantial ; but a further examination will reveal that this distinction is only in appearance, and that the two are really one.

Let us look at this for a moment, for it has a moral significance and application which we cannot afford to ignore. It will be readily perceived, even by those who know least about the question, that a steady hand, a clear eye, precision of judgement in sighting, and a full knowledge and control of his weapon are absolute requirements in a marksman. But these qualities have to be acquired, and their acquisition can be reached only through patient and persistent training. Express this in moral terms, and it means self-denial and self-discipline issuing in self-control, which in its essential nature is the very antithesis of sin. Failure points to the absence of these qualities ; any want of self-restraint will impart itself to the weapon, will register itself in the pressure of the trigger, and emerge in the score. Intemperance in eating or drinking, any want of command in the realm of temper or appetite, will unfailingly report

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itself at the target. One of the winners of the Queen's prize at Bisley assured me that a slight domestic difference at the breakfast-table with his wife on the morning of a rifle-match, threw him off the target for the whole day.

But, it may be asked : 'Are there not conditions of light, atmosphere, wind, &c., which lie outside the marksman himself, and which may defeat his best endeavours to score?' So, indeed, at first it would appear ; but, as a matter of fact, all these deflecting agencies are capable of being gauged and so provided against as to be practically cancelled. Such proficiency, however, comes alone through the training of the judgement, the development of which can be achieved only through practice in all weathers, in all lights, and in all winds ; and this comes back inevitably to the same thing, viz. self-control, which, as we have seen, is the exact opposite of sin. The putting up of a first-class record at the ranges, then, has a distinct moral significance—it becomes an index of moral qualities and the manifestation of a twofold mastery : first, over self within, and secondly, over circumstances without.

Now, if all we have said be true of so precise a weapon as the rifle, it becomes immeasurably accentuated in the case of so clumsy a weapon as the bow and arrow. We only need to think for a

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moment of how much is done for us in a rifle, with its accurate bore, its grooved spiral, its fine adjustments for sighting, and its carefully constructed projectiles, to see that to become a good archer and cleave the distant mark in all winds and weathers requires unspeakably more in the way of practice and self-command than even to become a good rifle-shot.

How deeply philosophical, then, does the analogy between sin and the missing of a mark appear, when it is seen that the failure to hit has its root not in the weapon, nor in circumstances, but in the personal will of the marksman, which should be the master and not the slave of all the forces of nature, whether within or without. This ancient definition, then, thus interpreted, disposes at once of two modern heresies, one of which makes sin to be purely the result of organization and tracks all moral delinquency down to a physical basis, and the other which finds the cause of all wrong-doing in environment, and proposes through a change in outward circumstances to effect a change of heart. Clearly no philosophy of sin can be sound which finds its sole explanation in the outward act. We are compelled to place its source and fount in the deflection of the personal will. Our repeated failure to deal with it at the stage of manifestation should of itself be

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quite sufficient to throw us back from the realm of mere effects into that of causes, where alone it can be successfully treated. You might as well try to deal with the direction of a bullet when singing its way to the mark, as deal with sin after it is projected into deed. If you wish to affect the line of a bullet's flight you must first of all influence the personal will of which it is the expression and effect. Any other process will be vain in dealing with sin. You have stood at some time or other on a bowling-green and watched the carefully calculated and deliberate delivery of a ball to which was entrusted some difficult and delicate commission ; and as it curved in towards the 'kitty' you have perhaps witnessed the physical contortions of the bowler, holding his breath at the imminent risk of apoplexy, and throwing himself into the most grotesque attitudes, as if he thought that by twisting his body he could impart his volition into the ball. Of course, all this is very absurd, and no one would be more ready to concede it than the bowler himself ; but it finely illustrates the absurdity of similar and equally abortive attempts to deal with sin in its issue instead of at its source.

Sin, then, according to the Scriptures, is want of self-control. If a missed mark means, as we have shown, the absence of self-mastery, then, as a man

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must be either the master or the slave of his lower self, for him to sin is to relinquish his mastery and pass into what the apostle calls the law of death. Indeed, as we penetrate into the inner circle of Paul's thought, as expressed in our text, we see with how fine an insight, with how relentless a logic, he develops and applies this principle. Look at the verses again, and read them in the light of all that we have said. 'Let not sin—the thing that misses the mark, that deflects from the straight—let not this principle of misdirection reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof; neither present ye your members unto the principle of misdirection as instruments, or weapons, of unrighteousness or inaccuracy; but present yourselves unto God as alive from the dead, and your members as weapons or instruments of righteousness or precision unto God.' Sin, then, is want of self-mastery issuing in the missing of life's aim. It is misdirection, it is to fire wide or fall short of the appointed mark. It does not sight the forces of life to their highest. Every one knows how, in sighting, provision has to be made for the pull downwards of the ball, and that the trajectory is a curved flight from the moment the ball leaves the muzzle. To overcome the down-drag of the earth's attraction the laws of elevation must be observed, or all the force will be buried in the

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earth. So with the forces of life. We must aim high to overcome what might be called the law of moral gravitation that would curve down our noblest aspirations to the dust.

To sin is to obey the self-will and deny the Christ-will. He that would escape from sin must therefore accept the Christ-will and deny the self-will. It is a daily surrender, not made once and for all, for the will is the subject of perpetual solicitation to wrong. At no stage will the grace of God become so overpoweringly strong in us as to render the soul immune from temptation, else its continuance in well-doing would possess no moral quality. Every day the two wills present themselves for election, and with one or other we must inevitably choose. True, by repeated preference of the higher the soul accumulates force, becomes strengthened in good and practised in righteousness; but at no time can it afford to sleep securely in the thought that it may be safely trusted as a mere matter of course to choose inevitably the right.

The will, that is to say, needs not only to have its native deviation corrected, it requires to be constantly exercised in the new direction. Indeed, so long has the body, with its complex structure, been the servant of the self-will, that for it to pass at once under a new mastership, with all the readjustments which the new

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management involves, must bring it into frequent collision with the law of habit which has established itself in the members—that is, the tendency of parts to act mechanically and without any prompting of the will. Now, the hopelessness of self-recovery lies in this fact, that the will itself becomes captive to the very habits it has succeeded in forming, just as a river cuts its own bed and creates the banks which shut it in and limit the freedom of its play. The bodily members which were once the servants of the will end by becoming its masters. Everything goes well as long as the will imposes upon them no fresh legislation ; but we must not be surprised if the attempt should fail to change at will practices which have become fixed in habits, woven into the very texture of both body and brain. Some of my readers have no conception of the power of sin in their members—no idea of the tyranny of evil habits. Not because you have none, but because you have never tried conclusions with them. There is nothing more pathetic to be found in the whole range of spiritual autobiography than the story of Paul's own futile struggle with habitual sin. 'I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man. But I see another law in my members (that is habit), warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me

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into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Now, what was true for Paul is true for us. However bound we may be by evil habit, if we will but throw ourselves wholly on God for salvation He will redirect our will and empower it in the new direction, delivering our lives from moral inaccuracy, and causing them to cleave the mark of our high calling in Jesus Christ our Lord.

III

The Tragedy of Unfulfilled Trust

A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, &c.
—LUKE xiii. 6-9.

UNDER cover of this parable Christ sets forth the tragedy of an unfulfilled trust, the pathos of hope deferred, and the long-suffering patience that will not despair of response till it has had recourse to that last and most desperate of remedies, the stimulus of threatened doom.

Here was a tree placed in vital relation to a soil that drank the sunshine and the rains. Presumably the vineyard in which it was planted was justifying the toil expended in its culture and upkeep, and was doubtless introduced into the parable in order to show that the fig-tree's default in the matter of fruit was not due to any defect in environment. It was planted in a cultivated area, and constantly under the dresser's eye and hand. It was no exotic, to whom the surroundings were strange and uncongenial, calling for new and unaccustomed adjustments, and

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thereby increasing the struggle for existence. It was at home, native to the place, indigenous to the soil.

Thus every element is introduced into the parable that could serve to fix the cause of unfruitfulness in the tree itself. Did it dare to complain of its surroundings, then the richly responsive vines, with their purple-and-amber clusters, would at once give it the lie. It laid its appropriating hands upon everything within its reach—earth, air, water, light—indeed all that the wheeling seasons brought in their liberal hands. It took all these golden gifts, but gave back nothing in return, employing them merely to keep up its own barren and self-centred life. The whole of nature had converged upon this tree for one end—fruit ; and it had failed to respond. Thus selfishness can defeat and run to waste ten thousand generous and self-sacrificing impulses. All the forces of nature are at the call of life. For its upbuilding and propagation they bend their willing necks. The whole solar system, the chemistries of earth and heaven, the very stars in their courses, fight the battle of life. They are all in the process, and make their cheerful contribution to its far-reaching ends. These forces meet here as nowhere else. At the vital point they converge, and yield themselves up as though they had found the worthy end of all their working in becoming the servitors of life, thus

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reproducing and perpetuating both themselves and it. For every seed holds in its close-shut hand something of all that has made its contribution to life. Like Ulysses it can truly say, 'I am a part of all that I have met.' In a seed we have the concentrated and transfigured earth and air and sunshine packed up and stored, till that which put them to sleep shall again summon them forth from their slumber and clothe them in newness of life.

For a tree or plant, therefore, to stop short of flower or fruit, 'whose seed is in itself after its kind,' is for it to become a terminal instead of a transmitting centre of vital force. It becomes guilty of 'holding up' the train of life. This is disloyalty to the great law of reproduction imposed on all life in the beginning of days. Life, whether individual or national, according to Christ's teaching, is a thing not merely to be possessed and enjoyed. It is a sacred trust, to be guarded from desecration, heightened in efficiency, administered with fidelity, and strenuously directed to the highest ends.

The parable had, of course, a special and local application to the Jewish nation. Israel had been 'planted in a very fruitful hill.' She had been divinely selected, and constituted the trustee of a great religion which, through her, was intended by

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God to become the religion of the race. In the seed of faithful Abraham were all the nations of the earth to be blessed. But though Israel thus held the true faith in stewardship for all the world, she had made no attempt to propagate it. She put forth no fruit for the passer-by. True, some of her prophets, with a wider outlook and a larger sympathy, had occasionally sounded the universal note ; but the people never rallied to the call. They kept the knowledge of the true and only God to themselves ; consequently the idolatries which they failed to influence for good influenced them for ill. Israel had not only a better religion than her neighbours, but, springing out of her religion, she had a better social system and sanitary code. Instead, however, of universalizing this light, she had sought to keep it, till she fell a victim to her own selfishness and had to be displaced.

These special and local features against which the parable was directed have passed, but the principle therein disclosed and enunciated is permanent for all time and for every land. It is the principle which determines that life everywhere must vindicate its right to continuance by making an adequate return for what it has received. 'Freely ye have received, freely give' is the law that runs through and controls all the kingdoms of life. The circle of force must

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be completed. Life demands of the organism in which it holds temporary residence unhindered thoroughfares, along whose highways it may pour its reproductive powers.

The barren fig-tree did not offer a clear line for life's full and free expression and self-multiplication, and thereby forfeited its right to continued existence. Instead of becoming a means to life's ends, it used up and ended life's means. Life had gone to all the trouble of constructing this tree in order that it might become the medium of transmitted force, only to find that it was a non-conductor through which the vital current could not pass.

Instead of furthering it defeated the very purpose for which it had been built and sustained. It had as much right to continuance as a post office that merely received but never delivered the correspondence committed to its trust. This tree, then, instead of transmitting life, entrapped it. Instead of allowing it to reproduce itself in luxurious fruit it thwarted and enslaved it, turning all its would-be sweetness into astringent leaves. It simply turned all the forces that so generously poured themselves out at its feet, into means of self-enlargement. Think of the pathos of life's defeat in its own house, so to speak, and through the disloyalty of its own child. At the back of this barren scion had been countless

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generations of loyal heirs who had been true to the laws of succession. Through them life had found free and joyous passage without detention. Now, however, it comes to arrest. Instead of receiving the 'staff,' and being passed on as from a temporary stopping-place, it is permanently side-tracked and unable to deliver the message with which it has been entrusted. The long train of continuity is broken. After coming so far and faring so well, it finds itself baulked and imprisoned in a hopeless *cul-de-sac*.

Here we have typified the individual, the Church, the nation that is simply a receiving and not a distributing centre of blessing bestowed. We are blessed and saved, to serve. No man is saved for his own sake alone, but that he may become the medium of transmitted life. Christ gets foothold in our lives that He may thereby reach out to some one else. The barren fig-tree, instead of being a thoroughfare, was a 'dead-end.' How many spiritual dead-ends there are in the Church of Christ!—souls into which the spiritual life has come, but through which it cannot pass to vitalize the lives of others. Christ is longing for free passage through us to our fellow men. Instead of a highway, are we confronting Him with a closed road?

The writer had but recently taken up his residence in a new circuit. About two o'clock one morning

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he was roused from sleep by his telephone, and, hastening to his study, found that he was being rung up from the General Hospital. One of the resident doctors was speaking, and he explained that a man was dying without Christ, that they could not keep him alive until the morning, and would the minister mind coming at once? Promptly assenting, he dressed in haste, rushed along one street, down a second, along a third, in the direction of the hospital ; only, however, to find himself in a blind-alley which he had mistaken for a through road. How long, think you, did he stay there? Not an instant. He had no use for closed roads that night. He wanted to get to a dying and despairing man with a message of immortal life and hope, and nothing but a through road would serve.

Christ wants to get through your life and mine to dying men, dying women, dying children. Are we giving Him a clear and unimpeded path? A saved man is not to be a salvation-terminus, but a receiving and transmitting station, through which there is running a continuous train of redeeming force to every other man and woman and child. Christ has no use for closed roads ; let, therefore, every redeemed life show the signal of a clear line for the King.

But this is not merely a religious question ; it is a social and commercial question as well. Or, to

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—
speak more correctly, because it is a religious question all other questions—family, social, commercial, and economic—are thereby involved.

The barren fig-tree may be regarded as typifying the business, whether individual or corporate, that is run on purely selfish lines. We have seen that everything was for the tree, but that the tree was only for itself. It made no contribution to the general good. It was always absorbing, greedily grasping everything above and beneath and around merely for self-enlargement; multiplying hands and mouths for the purpose of still further acquisition and appropriation, yet never by any chance putting anything into anybody else's hand or mouth. This is the type of an all too common condition of things in the world of men. As soon, however, as any individual, or cluster of individuals in the shape of a company, seeks to exploit society in the interests of any particular trade or industry, and to the detriment of the common weal, they become a menace to the social order, and society is bound in self-defence to limit and prescribe their power. Up to a certain point, of course, the individual is to be encouraged and protected in seeking his own interests. He has a right to live, and therefore to the legitimate means of living. But once in the assertion of his rights he begins to ignore and trample

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on the rights of others, he becomes an element of peril, to be guarded against in society's interests, and therefore, in the long run, of his own. For if society should perish through the violation of its fundamental principles, it is not likely that its parasites will share any better fate. The modern tendency to form trusts, combines, and corners is a form of sectional selfishness in the body corporate which, unless arrested, will overthrow the social fabric. Where the individual and the sectional conscience have been warped and weakened through an over-devotion to material ends, the corporate conscience has to come in to its rectification and reinforcement, and affirm the ethical basis of the social system, without which society would speedily cease to be. That these great ethical principles are implicit in the social structure is rendered clear in times of commercial crisis, when they translate themselves into terms that are startlingly clear. The Chicago meat scandals prove to what a depth of moral degradation the mercenary spirit, if unrestrained, will drag men down. We have read how human life has been ruthlessly sacrificed, and the whole world sown broadcast with the germs of rottenness and disease, for the mere purpose of gratifying an insatiable and unconscionable greed for gold. But this is only an exaggerated form of the selfsame greed which we have in our own midst, and

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which, if not held in restraint, will turn business into a universal system of chicanery and fraud. What a satire on our advanced civilization, that society has to take precautionary measures against the very individuals that compose her, and who owe all they possess to her shelter and care, lest, like the barren fig-tree, they cumber the ground! Yet such is the selfishness of human nature that this is everywhere so. The individual is for ever forgetting, and requires to be for ever reminded, that he owes duties to society as well as to himself. The time is coming when the man who seeks merely to enrich himself independently of how or at whose expense, the man who grinds the faces of the poor and sweats his employés, the man who lowers the quality of work produced as well as the wages of the producer, simply to batten and fatten on the spoils of broken hearts and desolated homes, will be regarded as a monstrosity. In the new social order which is emerging such a creature will be degraded from citizenship and denied its rights. He will be treated as a malignant growth, to be as swiftly as possible eliminated, lest he infect the mass.

Look at it in this way. Let the human body, with all its multiplied organs and functions, represent society with all its numerous grades of life and service. Now the body is divided up into

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millions of cells, and every cell has first of all a private and personal duty to discharge. It must build itself up by drawing on the common stock of nourishment for its support. But, having fulfilled its individual duty, it has now communal duties to discharge in concert with all its fellow cells, lending its quota of support to the upkeep and efficient functioning of the whole. For any individual cell, or company of cells, to merely receive without contributing would be to set up a mutinous state within the commonwealth of the body: living on its life, dependent upon it for nutriment, accepting all the advantages, but discharging none of the obligations which its residence involves. What is this but parasitism of the most malignant order, which, if not arrested, will extend its area of anarchy, breaking down loyal cells by infection into disaffection, till the whole body falls under the power of death? This is the principle which the barren fig-tree stands for, and that it too fully typifies the commercial spirit of the age will be admitted by all. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the sole idea of going into business is, confessedly, to make money. But clearly, and on merely sociological grounds, this should not be the one and only aim. Up to a point, as I have shown, a man is quite right in making provision for maintaining both himself and those dependent

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upon him in plenty and comfort. But he holds relations to the larger life of the social organism of which he forms a part, and relations everywhere carry obligations from which he cannot be released. A man ought to be ashamed to say—and the time will come when he will be ashamed to say—that he is in business simply for what he can make. What would you think of a doctor who practised his profession merely for gain? You know he is expected to get up any hour of the night, go any distance, and take any risk without considering the question of fee or reward at all. His motto is 'I serve.' Why should you choose a lower motto for your business than he for his profession? There is no reason but a selfish one why trade should not be as noble as the profession of medicine. This being so, it rests entirely with trade and commerce to redeem themselves from their sordidness, and conduct their operations on a loftier plane. Till they do, it becomes necessary for society, in self-defence, to protect itself from individuals and companies who regard it as existing only to be exploited, defrauded, and deceived. The call is urgent for such anti-Trust legislation as will render impossible this 'barren fig-tree' kind of business that seeks to monopolize everything and give nothing—or as near to nothing as it can—in return.

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It is true that society exists for the individual, but the individual exists also for the society ; and it is on the fulfilment of reciprocal relations that the ideal state is to be based. It is not as though we landed in this life with so much stock and capital in hand, and ready at once to start business on 'our own.' No ; we come empty-handed and inefficient. The only thing we arrive with is an appetite ; and if it is not at once appeased—well, the world soon knows. Society has to provide us with everything during our unproductive years ; and is there anything unreasonable in the claim that we should make its interests our own, and render our contribution to the common weal ? Every law of God and man is against this selfish exclusivism. If you push behind and beneath our legal code anywhere, you will discover this ethical principle expressed or implied. Take the legislation relating to patent rights. Under statute law all such rights are terminable in fourteen years. Society thus says that no man shall have an exclusive right even to the product of his own brains ; and it is worthy of note that the right is not granted in the interests of the inventor, but of society, that others may be encouraged to research. And the reason is plain : because the power to invent is not exclusively a man's own. He has derived it through successive genera-

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tions of thinking. He is the product of forces that preceded him, and without which he would have been powerless to invent. He has climbed up to his mental view-point on the shoulders of his ancestors. He has reaped the harvests which he did not sow, and his invention is his proper return for what he has so freely received. It was this return which the fig-tree failed to make, and it was therefore condemned.

Now what is the sum of all this but 'Beware of covetousness'? The only thing to eradicate this element is the introduction of a new life-principle. It is a social trouble. Every social trouble, in its last analysis, is an individual trouble, and every individual trouble resolves itself finally into a trouble of the heart. If we would rectify society, we must begin with self. Only the man who lives to serve deserves to live.

What is true of the individual is true of the nation. Britain holds great moral and spiritual truths not merely for enjoyment but in trust for the race. Unless she be loyal to this stewardship her commission will be cancelled and her displacement will be sure.

IV

The Generation of a Thought-atmosphere

Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.—PHIL. iv. 8.

THE mental and moral environment of these Philippians must have been anything but favourable to their highest development. They were surrounded with pagan influences and all the down-dragging forces of a decadent civilization that was already tottering to its fall. There was nothing in their social surroundings conducive to their spiritual life. Even the physical beauties of sun and moon and stars, of mountains, rivers, and sea, were so marred by association with idolatrous rites and practices as to be suggestive of evil rather than good.

It became necessary, therefore, for them to create for themselves and within themselves a new heaven and a new earth, wherein should dwell ideals of

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purity and righteousness—a world of high thought and imagination, into which they might retire and find retreat from the trickery and fraud of the market-place, the impurity and insincerity of social life, and the gossip and scandal of the street.

The text is finely suggestive of the mental power and possibility of human life in the way of creating for itself a thought-atmosphere that shall be charged with moral oxygen, and thus, amid the most unholy surroundings, provide a breathing-space for the soul. A man's mental world is, after all, his own. It will be just what he chooses to make it. He may not at all times be able to choose his occupation or his society, but he may choose his thoughts. Undesirable companionships may be forced upon him by the necessities of an uncontrollable circumstance. His eyes may be compelled to witness unholy sights, and his ears to listen to unhallowed sounds from which he cannot flee, because his duty requires him to stay. Observe, Paul makes no suggestion of flight to these Philippians. There is no hint of escape from city life, with its multiplied temptations. To a man like Paul that would have been a cowardly repudiation of responsibility. For a man to escape all contact with evil he must needs go out of the world, and this is precisely what a Christian may not do. His business is in the world. He must stand down with

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both feet in the market-place, the exchange, and the street, because the world can be saved alone by contact, and any aloofness on the part of Christian men will be clear dereliction of duty.

The teaching of the text, however, is that though a man may thus be compelled to mingle with the many-sided life of the community, and have his senses daily assailed with unhallowed sights and sounds, he may nevertheless create an inner world of thought and feeling that shall be all his own, and over which he may hold sway with despotic power, ruling out all that is base and unworthy by ruling in all that is pure and lovely and of good report. This is of necessity a gradual acquirement, and comes alone of self-discipline. Here is a kingdom where every man may reign monarch of himself and be master of his fate. Alas! how few of us have yet come to our kingdom and realized our power of self-control! Hence our want of poise in the presence of the petty cares that should have no power to vex the soul had we but learnt the secret of the text. The will must stand sentry on the threshold of the mind, challenging every footfall, demanding the password of purity, and refusing hospitality to every thought that cannot abide this test. 'Come in without knocking' must not be the device inscribed upon the doors of thought;

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they must not be on the swing for the entrance of all and sundry. Nothing but what is morally clean and wholesome should be admitted there.

That it may be the duty of moral physicians and nurses to study the cause and cure of moral disease, and for pathological purposes to dwell upon them in their thoughts, goes without saying. But even here care must be taken to preserve the mind from the intrusion of such subject except when under actual study, lest the mental vision become set in its focus for the detection of disease, and through constant contact with abnormal types suffer in diminished tone. I remember saying to some hospital nurses who were just about going off duty, 'I suppose you girls discuss your several cases when you meet outside?' and being met by the rejoinder, 'Most decidedly not! We try to forget all about such things except when actually engaged.' And this is undoubtedly wise. The mind could never recover tone and elasticity, except such things as patients, doctors, medicines, and antiseptics, were thus banished from the thought.

In the case of the ordinary individual, however, to dwell upon disease, whether physical or moral, is not only unnecessary, but positively wrong, and works irreparable harm. There are morbid minds which naturally fasten upon anything that is diseased,

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and are fascinated by the abnormal in literature or in life. Under the pretence of a passion for what they call realism, they familiarize themselves with the seamy side of life. But this is not the real and the true, but the false. Why should the low and vicious be selected as the type, and served up in literature as mental pabulum? 'Oh,' says one, 'they are facts!' Well, a dead dog in a back lane is a fact, and a very repulsive one; but that is no reason for placing it on the sideboard. Much of the literature that finds its way into the homes and minds of the people is of this 'dead dog' variety, and needs burying quickly and deeply, with no hope of resurrection. Feed and fill their mind with wholesome images, and with visions of all that is fair and fragrant, avoiding all that is low and vulgar, whether in literature or life. For, by a wondrous process of assimilation, we become like the thoughts and people with whom we associate, and take the colour of the books we read.

In the mental world there is no limit to a man's possible possessions. His means may be slender and his surroundings dull even to dreariness. It matters not. The mind may become a kingdom rich beyond the dreams of avarice. The walls of the imagination may be hung round with pictures surpassing any painter's fancy or poet's dream. The

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chamber of the brain may be peopled by the pure and lofty of every country and of every age. By a mere act of will at any moment of the night or day a man may surround himself with the forces of the unseen holy. The ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ever hover round the threshold of the mind, and only wait a word of welcome to enter in and flood the inner chambers of life with a pure, unearthly joy. Give hospitality to these heavenly visitants, who bring with them their own atmosphere of life and love. Whatsoever things, then, are true and honest and pure, *keep thinking* on these—for such is the force of the tense here employed. The mind, like the body, takes the character of its staple food. The bodily structure is modified by the class of nourishment received. There is every reason to believe that the quality of a man's thoughts reacts on the brain-cells, and that pure and wholesome thinking makes for a strong and capable brain. Certain it is that a man's thoughts affect the structure of his character. He is, in fact, what his thoughts are. It is there he will be judged. Not in his deeds merely, but in his desires; not in his performance, but in his purpose. It is not what you do, but what you would do if you dared, that reveals and determines your moral character and career. 'As a man

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thinketh in his heart, so is he.' Dwell, then, in thought upon all that is highest and best. You may thus create a thought-atmosphere for the mind which will render it temptation-proof. Every sinful act was first of all a sinful thought. The mind is the breeding-ground of sin. It is here that the work of extermination must be achieved, before the unwholesome brood is hatched, because when once an evil thought succeeds in winging its way into action, it passes for ever beyond recall or control. A rigid censorship must be exercised over all communications that seek access to consciousness through the gateways of the mind. Such an uncompromising attitude will induce a fine spiritual sensitiveness, which will act automatically towards temptation as the eyelid acts towards the dust of the street. Is it not true that you allow thoughts to troop in as guests of the mind, which, if they were rendered incarnate, and as personal characters in flesh and blood sought admission to your homes, you would indignantly drive from your doors? Why should you keep company with thoughts the quality of which, if known to your friends, would give you shame and lessen you in their esteem?—the more so, that you must mentally descend to the level of your thoughts. You may keep up a semblance of modesty, purity, and truth; but if you allow your minds to brood upon the unchaste, the immodest,

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the mean, and the low, then the whole guilty progeny of evil deeds will speedily emerge. Your practice will grade to your thinking. What you are inwardly in thought you will presently show yourselves to be outwardly in acts. Men sin so frequently in the region of thought, they create so many imaginary situations in which they mentally side with evil, in their day-dreams they so often take sin by the hand, and turn their backs on truth and purity, that they lose moral tone. Hence it comes to pass that when the actual and outward solicitation to evil occurs they find themselves so lowered in their power of resistance that they fall easy victims to the circumstance of the hour. As a matter of fact, however, the battle was morally lost long before this outward fall. It was lost on the field of thought. It has to be dated back months, or even years—just as in a game of chess a wrong move at the commencement delivers you over to your opponent; and though the final issue may be postponed for hours, yet all the same, at the conclusion you know the game was lost from that point, and you have to hark back to that fatal move to find the pivot on which your fortune turned. So is it in the game of life. Many a man can look back to a point in his mental history when the determining struggle took place—the moral Waterloo from which his

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career has taken an upward or a downward trend. Stand sentry, then, ever at the doorways of thought, and when that which is impure or ignoble is suggested, let the pure purpose leap out like a flaming weapon of steel and put the foe to flight.

To be thinking of nothing in particular is always a peril. Mental preoccupation is the surest safeguard against evil thoughts. Have, then, some definite object of thought, and then strenuously direct your mental forces upon it. Of course, if you have not trained your mind to concentration, you will at first find this difficult. But do not be discouraged. The mind, like the body, resents at first the discipline imposed by the will. It prefers wandering fancy-free to being bitted and bridled and made to serve. But the forces of life will run to waste, or, what is worse, to wickedness, unless you thus gain the mastery over your thoughts. Should they break away you must head them off and round them in. Only thus can you ever come to have, literally, a mind of your own : that is to say, a mind under perfect control and the dutiful servant of your will. In this mental sense every man must be master in his own house. He must hold the lordship of his own brain. Only thus can he turn the full force of his concentrated thought upon a given thing at a given time. This power to focalize all your mental forces to the burning-point

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of achievement is everywhere the condition of success. The masters in the world of action first of all achieved mastery in the realm of thought. They learnt how to concentrate. They won the right to rule events by their power to rule their minds. Even when, as in the case of the Napoleons and Fredericks of history, this power has been misdirected and misapplied, the spectacle of whole-souled men selecting some definite object of pursuit, and then bending to its achievement all the energies of body and mind, has commanded the admiration even of those who were loudest in dispraise. What, then, shall be said of men in whom some great and holy purpose has drained all the forces of mind and soul and flesh into a single channel, and made them sweep in one full stream towards the goals of desire? This spells 'success,' while all else, however apparently golden, will be only failure written large. Have a mind, then, so filled with pure and wholesome thoughts that anything of a mean and low cast will be met on the threshold with so chilling a reception that it will be glad to retreat. You know only too well how to do this sort of thing in the social circle. You can make the atmosphere of the drawing-room for any unwelcome guest so uncommonly like a blizzard, that he feels instinctively for his hat and umbrella, and seeks the shelter of the more congenial

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street! Exercise the same discrimination in the choice of your thoughts, the more so that they tend to pass by a process of moral assimilation into the permanent structure of your souls. Then, too, thoughts, like persons, go in families. Admit one, and immediately he introduces his relatives, pressing them upon your notice with such pertinacity that your difficulty in dismissing them will be in direct proportion to the logical accuracy with which your mental machinery performs its work.

The injunction of the text is positive. It tells you what to make the staple of your thought. Your mind must work on something. If you do not supply it with thought-material, the devil will. But why should you allow your brain to become the devil's dumping-ground? Remember that, if evil spirits have the power of passing into our lives, it must be in the shape of evil thoughts. Indeed, an evil thought may well be regarded as an evil spirit—a wicked entity, descending upon and darkening the mind, dulling all the higher sensibilities, and rousing the lower into unholy activity. Surely if there are ministering spirits sent forth from the highest to help those who shall be heirs of salvation, there are likely to be hindering spirits sent forth from the lowest to thwart every noble purpose, to turn every high aspiration to the dust, and thus minister to our doom.

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You will remember, in the Parable of the Unclean Spirit that went out of the man, walking through dry places, seeking rest and finding none, Christ taught that salvation is a positive process, and that the mere negative condition of being dispossessed of evil was no guarantee of virtue, no safeguard against vice. It is this positive element which our text brings into prominence. Paul does not say, 'Do not think on the untrue, the impure, the dishonourable.' Christianity is not a set of prohibitions merely. It provides a positive field for the full and fair discharge of all the functions of mind, body, and soul. It uses up the whole man in its service. No faculty runs to waste. It finds a place and a use for every ounce of force, and employs it in ways that secure the highest and most enduring returns.

Let us dispossess ourselves of the idea that the religion of Jesus Christ is one of mere repression. It is not. It is one of assertion, of expansion, of liberation! It puts the lower self under restraint that the higher and godlike self may find free scope for the unfettered use of its powers. The kingdom of God includes trade, commerce, science, art, music, literature, politics—indeed, everything that is true and worthy in the kingdom of man. That all these are too frequently degraded from the ideal, and 'soiled by all ignoble use,' is, alas, too true. But here, in our

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text, lies the line along which alone both their redemption and ours can come. Keep thinking on the right, the pure, the honourable, the transparent. Do not vulgarize your minds with thoughts or ideals that are common or unclean. It may be that there are base-minded men of your acquaintance who descend to mean and dishonourable practices in business, and who 'succeed.' Well, do not think of such. Dwell upon the highest and best, and resolve to be among them. Prefer rather to go down a thousand times, with a clean record, than to succeed with an accusing conscience and at the cost of honour. We purchase wealth and place and power too dearly when they cost us character. The gain of ungodliness is a Dead Sea fruit, and will turn to dust and ashes on our lips. Remember the word of Christ: 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' But you say: 'Christ did not know anything about business.' Some men will find to their embarrassment, when it comes to the final audit of accounts, that Jesus Christ knows a little too much about business for them. Christ does more business in five minutes than all the exchanges of the world could put through in a thousand years. He knows all about men—the trickery and fraud of the market and the exchange, the evils of the competitive system, the cruelty of the sweater, the swindling of

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the bogus company promoter. He knows the vortex of temptation, down whose swirling throat so many are being swept to their doom. But He knows how to succour them that are tempted. He will stand down with you at the desk in the counting-house, at the bench, to help you as your Brother-man. Keep thinking of Him. Thus only can you fulfil the injunction of the text. Truth, honour, purity, and all the rest of the virtues are exceedingly difficult to think on as mere abstract ideas, even for those whose minds are trained. But all these lines of beauty and grace converge and concrete in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He gathers up all purity and grace in His own matchless Personality. Think, then, of Him, walk with Him, talk with Him ; and by companionship with Him who is the 'holiest among the mighty, and the mightiest among the holy,' you will be changed into the same image from glory into glory as by the Spirit of God.

V

Christ's Cure for Worry

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.—MATT. vi. 33.

WE all know something of worry. At least, those of us who have squarely faced life and felt its stress and strain. Of course there are some persons in every community who never worry. They let their butchers and their bakers and their bankers do the worrying, while they laugh their way through the world at other people's expense. They drink the best wines, smoke the best cigars, occupy the best seats in the theatre, and generally indulge themselves to their hearts' content, while their unhappy creditors have to be satisfied with half a crown in the pound. This may be clever, but it is not honest; and our business is not with these to-day, but with the struggling multitude, who are anxious to live honestly and pay their way. Speaking generally, these all know something about worry, something of that anxiety with regard to the future

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that presses on the spirit and throws its shadow across the life.

Most men will agree that, for the majority of folk, the worries of life come along one or other of the lines indicated by Christ in the verses which lead up to His prescription, and which ought to be read in order to its full appreciation. 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?' Is it not a fact that if some one could come to all worried men and anxious women of the world, and guarantee them all they want to eat and drink and wear down to the latest moment of life, their lives would at once move up to a higher level and take on a different tone? Aye! and if it could be guaranteed their children too; for, after all, there are men and women everywhere who do not care so much for themselves. They have gone without and roughed it in the past, and would be prepared to go without again if only they could be assured that the little people would be safe—that some strong hand would be reached down to clasp theirs and guide them through the pathway of the coming years. Then life would indeed become to them a 'grand, sweet song.'

Now, if we rightly interpret the Saviour's words, we have just such a guarantee in the text. Let us look at it. First let us call to mind the people

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to whom these words were spoken. There is great danger of so idealizing the people among whom Christ moved—just as we idealize the places—as to miss the comfort which His words convey, by supposing them to be addressed to quite another order of beings. As a matter of fact, they were ordinary, everyday folk, like ourselves. They had the same burdens to carry, the same battles to fight, the same temptations to face ; they had to run their business, give credit, and be defrauded by the unscrupulous, just as men have to-day. They had to meet their bills, pay interest on overdrafts, and generally win their bread-and-butter in much the same way as we have to win ours. It was for the very reason that these common, ordinary, everyday folk found in Christ's message a tone of sympathy, of brotherliness, and ready helpfulness which they missed from that of Pharisee and Scribe, that they came in crowding thousands to His feet.

Then, too, think of where this sermon was preached. Any preacher will tell you that the conditions under which his sermons are delivered make all the difference in the world as to their effect. So much depends on atmosphere. The discourse that quivers with the vital force of which it is the conductor when preached in one place, falls from the preacher's lips like a dead thing when delivered in another. This Sermon on the

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Mount was preached in the country ; it could never have been delivered so effectively amid the rush and roar, the traffic and tumult, of the market-place and the street.

Christ was an artist in preaching. He sought conditions favourable for His message. The writer remembers, during a great financial crisis, having a city congregation in which were gathered families upon whom the collapse had come with startling and ruinous results. He can call to mind the strained and anxious look on the faces of men who during that awful crisis came home from business and got into their slippers and easy-chairs, but not into an easy mind. Men went to bed in those days not to sleep, but to toss through hours of planning and scheming as to how to retrieve their fallen fortunes, and then to get up unrefreshed in the morning to face, it might be, fresh calamities. How the preacher longed to be able, with some magician's wand, on Sabbath mornings to transport his audience of tired men and anxious women away from the city to the country, to set them down amid the calm of field or forest, and within sight of waving grass and the sound of murmuring streams ! Then, indeed, there would hardly have been need of any human voice to soothe and bless, for Nature herself would have laid her healing hand upon their troubled spirits and hushed them into peace.

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This was just what Jesus did. He led the people out and away from the towns and the villages.

Away from the city heat,
From the glare of the stifling street,
To the uplands cool and sweet,
To sit at the Saviour's feet.

On those beautiful uplands of Galilee, with God's blue heaven above His head, the green grass beneath His feet, and purple-and-gold amaryllis blooming all round—while the ample air was filled with the fragrance of countless flowers and the music of singing birds, Jesus preached His glorious doctrine of deliverance from care, a doctrine which then, and now, and whenever or wherever it has been received, has wrought its miracle of healing and of peace.

It is all very well, however, to tell men not to worry ; the question is, how are they to escape ? First, let it be said, not through deliverance from work. This is the millennium for which some men are vainly waiting—to be eternally unemployed ! But there is no road this way out from care. It is rather the way in. If Christ had hinted, even in the most remote fashion, that escape from worry was going to lie along the road of escape from work, we might close this discussion without further inquiry, and conclude that here was no teacher sent from God ; for God Himself is a worker, and the

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whole universe throbs with His ceaseless activity. Are all things in motion? It is God who moves them. We speak of laws. We talk very familiarly of the system of the universe in this twentieth century of ours. But what are the laws of nature? They are simply the registered movements of the divine will—modes of His multiplied manifestation. All the measureless energies that sweep around us in nature and for ever beat with their rhythmic rise and fall, are flowing forth from His infinite Personality—energies that thunder among the mountains and heave in the restless sea; energies that curve the planets to their orbits and marshal the gleaming battalions of the sky; energies that everywhere pulse and beat and burn beneath the surface of the things we touch and see. Unhasting and unresting does He move through all things and uphold them with the word of His power. Truly the God of angels works! Christ was a worker too. 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.' Again, 'I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.' Labour was the law of His earthly life, as it is of ours; and in accepting it for Himself He both heightened its dignity and deepened its obligation for us.

It might be thought at first sight that His

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illustrations, drawn from the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, suggest that life, to be free from care, must be set free from work. But a closer view dispels the illusion. Let us look at them for a moment. First, with regard to birds. Would any one who knows anything of birds dream of classifying them with the unemployed? They are among the busiest of God's busy creatures. Awake with dawn and at it until dusk, they are at once a rebuke and an inspiration to those who will not work. If any one doubts the activity of the fowls of the air, let him sow some seed to-day, and it will be up to-morrow. The birds will have it up! Observe, too, it is the fowl of the air, and not the fowl of the backyard, which Christ selects for His illustration—just as it is the lilies of the field, and not of the garden, to which He points. There is a purpose in this. It is as though He desired to anticipate this question of work, and provide for its reply. As a matter of fact, the fowl of the air must work. The domestic fowl is largely released from this necessity, because its bread is certain and its water sure. But the bird of the air must scratch for its living, or perish with hunger and cold. Clearly, then, when Christ referred to fowls He did not point to the unemployed.

‘Well,’ it may be said, ‘that seems true about

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fowls ; but what about the lilies of the field ? They do not work ! ' No one who knows anything of the natural history of a flower would ever talk like that. Most people will agree that pumping is work. If any one doubts that it is, let him lay hold of the first garden pump he can find and give it a trial for half a day, and if, after the first hour, he does not conclude that pumping is work, he will at least concede that it is a fairly good substitute. Now the vegetable creation is a vast pumping-plant. Its plunging pistons are at work in every blade of grass, in every flower and plant and tree. Professor Edison has invented an instrument which, by being affixed to the stem of a flower, will so magnify the sound of these internal upbuilding processes that they smite on the ear like the roar of machinery at work. Indeed, it can not only be heard, but seen ! If you take a piece of *chara* or *nitella*—species of submerged weed which grow plentifully in most English brooks—and place it under a microscope, you will observe the plant at work. You will see granulated masses of protoplasm in active circulation in the cells, driven by some unseen power, and weaving the living tissue of which the structure is composed. It might, indeed, be said that every tiniest seed is a manufacturing centre whose sleeping forces merely require a favouring environment to

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bring them into action and thus set the subtle chemistries into operation that, together, work beneath our very eyes the daily miracle of growth. Talking of pumping, it has been computed by mathematicians that there is more water pumped up by the vegetable creation in a single day than rolls over the brink of Niagara in a whole year. But all this means work performed, energy put forth.

Look at it in this way. Some at least of my readers will know how much time and labour it requires to chop down a forest tree. There are Australian trees 300 ft. high and 60 ft. in girth. Lion-hearted and iron-handed men have gone forth to grapple with these forest giants. Many know to their cost what an expenditure of muscle and money it has meant to take down these trees. Did it ever occur to any of them how much energy it takes to put one of them up! Let us suppose a tree of the above dimensions lying on the road, and that we desired to put it up on end. What appliances we should require—what engineering knowledge and skill, what expenditure of force—just to uplift one tree! But these trees are already up. They are standing in millions throughout that great Commonwealth. And how did they get there? Why, by work—simple, downright, honest work. There is no other

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way. Every foot of growth represents so many foot-pounds of energy expended. And what is true of the trees is true of the lily and of every flower that blows. The lily of the field has to take hold of earth and air, and water and light, and translate them into living tissue, and it wins its crown of fragrant beauty at the cost of toil.

‘But, stay,’ you exclaim; ‘does not Christ specifically state that they “toil not”? ’ Yes, but we must be careful here, or we shall be snared by a word. The word translated ‘toil’ in the context does not mean mere work; it means work plus the very element which Christ is seeking to eliminate from life, viz. care.

It will be remembered that on one occasion Christ spoke a parable of a man who had retired to rest, but was roused at midnight by an importunate neighbour in need of bread, and complained of being disturbed. ‘Trouble me not, for I am in bed,’ he exclaimed. The word ‘trouble’ in that passage is the word here translated ‘toil.’ On another occasion, when the woman with an alabaster box of ointment came and broke its precious unguent over the feet of Christ, the disciples in general, and Judas in particular, murmured at what they called the ‘waste,’ and distressed the woman by their cold criticism of her beautiful deed. Christ, however,

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turned on them with the rebuke, 'Why trouble ye the woman?' Here again the word 'trouble' is the selfsame word which in connexion with the lilies is translated 'toil.' Clearly, then, it was not the act and fact of mere working that was denied of the lilies by Christ, but the working under distressful conditions, such as characterized the sons and daughters of men.

But if Christ did not wish to teach that birds and flowers were released from the necessity for work, why did He refer to them at all? What is the point of His illustration? The answer seems to be this. He saw the birds flying overhead, filling the air with music, and the flowers beneath His feet that flung their perfume to the breeze; and the care-free life of both was in such bright and happy contrast to that of the men and women into whose faces He looked as to suggest the line along which the deliverance of the latter could alone be sought. He said, in effect: 'You see these blithe and light-winged birds of the air, and these fragrant lilies of the field; well, they have no anxiety, because, belonging to a certain kingdom, they fulfil its laws, and in this fulfilment every need is met, and all they want to eat and drink and wear is found.'

And verily this is so.

From the moment that a bird breaks the shell—

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indeed, by the very act of breaking its shell—it seeks its kingdom. It has certain instincts whose promptings it obeys. It has not to be taught. You may hatch chickens in an incubator, and yet they will behave as though they had been there before. And it is along the line of obedience to these instincts, and fulfilled relations to their kingdom, which is none other than the kingdom of God for them, that they find their wants supplied.

As far back as Jeremiah's time, the loyalty of the birds to their migratory instinct was noted and employed by the prophet to rebuke the wooden-headed stupidity with which men misinterpret or ignore the instincts of the soul. 'The stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed time, the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgement of the Lord.' This migratory instinct among the fowls of the air is finely suggestive. If space permitted, some striking analogies could be instituted between the human spirit and these outward-bound and homing birds. Ornithologists have gone to great trouble and expense to collect facts with regard to birds of passage. R. M. Barrington, one of the greatest living authorities, has recently published the results of observations taken from forty-two lighthouses with regard to names of

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species, dates of departure, direction of flight, and dates of return of English migratory birds, in a work occupying 700 pages of closely printed matter.

The particular birds named by Jeremiah—the stork, the dove, the swallow, and the crane—are all well known to us; and the regularity with which they wing their way southward or northward, as the case may be, is such that, according to Barrington, in the absence of a calendar the observer could accurately fix the day of the month by the arrival of certain birds in certain localities. This instinct is so ineradicable that birds born in captivity will, in obedience to it, shift their quarters from one side of the cage to another. This loyalty to the law of instinct has been seized upon by the prophet to give point and power to the divine rebuke. Here are creatures on an infinitely lower plane of intelligence than man fulfilling their divinely implanted instincts, and thus escaping the rigours of climate and scarcity of food; while man, with his imperial gift of reason, mistakes and violates his deepest instincts, and turns them downward to the dust. The result of all this subversion is that his starved and neglected soul, like a migratory bird in captivity, beats its pinions hopelessly against its prison bars, and pines for the vision of God. Nor, according

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to Christ's teaching, does the trouble end there. The mental and the spiritual in man are not shut off from one another in air-tight compartments. They are intimately related. Spiritual disability emerges as commercial anxiety and domestic care, so that the redemption of the mind from worry can come alone through redemption of the soul from sin.

What is true of birds is equally true of flowers. They also belong to a kingdom; they too have what might be called instincts, which they unerringly seek to fulfil themselves, and in the process find their food and become girt with a beauty beside which even the raiment of kings coarsens into a tawdry and vulgar splendour. It is wonderful with what persistence a flower will seek its kingdom. If a shrub that needs plenty of light be planted in a shady place, it will be seen how instinctively it will work towards the sun. The same is true with regard to its need of water. The plant will send out roots to an almost incredible distance in search of the moisture whereby alone it can live.

Horticulturists declare that there is a sort of consciousness in plants by which they direct their movements, and thus seek to become their best. For instance, if a heap of bonedust be placed, say, on the south side of an apple-tree, it will almost

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immediately send out appropriating hands in that direction. Let, however, the heap be shifted to the north side, and at once the tree will change its tactics and reach unerringly towards the coveted nutriment in the new direction. Take the case of a climbing plant. If a stake be placed some feet to the right of it, it will travel instinctively towards it as its means of ascent; but if, while it is yet a foot away from the support, the stake be removed and placed on the left, the climber will at once become conscious of the changed location, and will turn and work towards it with a precision that seems born of sight.

Christ, then, may be regarded as saying: 'Just as these birds and flowers belong to a kingdom which they seek, and, in seeking, find that along the plane of their fulfilled relations every need is met, so you, men and women, belong to a kingdom—the kingdom of God. To this kingdom your deepest instincts are related. Be as loyal to these instincts as birds and flowers are to theirs. What they do of necessity you do of choice; and then you, like them, will find that all you want to eat and drink and wear will come to you along the line of your fulfilled relations to God.' Now, this is true and sound philosophy. One feels that, if it were not true, it is so eminently reasonable that it ought to be.

VI

‘The Line of Least Resistance’

Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.—MATT. vi. 33.

LET us now look at our subject from another point of view.

This injunction to ‘seek first the kingdom of God’ implies that the persons so enjoined are not as yet enrolled as citizens of that kingdom. They are among the alien population who are denied its rights. The rights and privileges of every kingdom are thus safeguarded and restricted to those who are liege subjects of the realm. The limitations of aliens under British law are clearly defined by statute. The alien may not exercise the franchise; he may not inherit land; he cannot even acquire by purchase any permanent tenure of land; having no heritable blood, he cannot bequeath land; he cannot own a British ship; he cannot hold any office of civil or military trust; before 1870 he could not even sue for the recovery of a debt.

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Imagine an alien tradesman at the beginning of the nineteenth century applying for a summons against a debtor. Upon making his application, the officer in charge, in pursuance of the legal form, inquires his name. A foreign name is given. Thereupon the officer questions the applicant as to whether he has become a naturalized subject of the British realm. Upon being assured to the contrary, he is compelled to tell the aggrieved foreigner that he has no redress. ‘What!’ says the unfortunate alien, ‘can I not recover money lawfully due to me for goods acknowledged by the debtor to have been received?’ The answer is, ‘No! The courts are not open to you; for, as an alien, you have no legal rights.’ ‘Then, what am I to do?’ exclaims the dispirited foreigner. ‘I cannot exercise the franchise; I cannot inherit or bequeath a foot of English soil; I cannot even recover a debt which the defaulter acknowledges to be due! What would you suggest as a remedy for all these vexing restrictions and limitations?’ ‘There is only one thing to do,’ says the English officer: ‘seek first the kingdom of Great Britain; hand in your allegiance to the throne; stand right in your relation to the king; and all these rights and privileges of citizenship will be added unto you. They will come to you along the lines of your fulfilled relations to the Crown.’ Now,

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even aliens themselves recognize the fairness of these conditions ; and, as a proof that they do, thousands of foreigners have preferred to sever their connexion with their own nationalities that they may enjoy the larger liberties, the more secure and ordered freedom, of the Anglo-Saxon race.

Here, then, is the teaching of the text. First and foremost, put yourself right with the King ; acquire the right of citizenship in His realm by a whole-hearted acceptance of His authority ; bind yourself to Him by such strait vows of loving loyalty that through your submission may come to you the freedom of the city and of the sons of God. And what is the freedom of the city but the freedom to do right, the deliverance of life from all low and selfish aims, and its direction to noble and imperial ends ?

Christ perceived that all the drag and drudgery of life sprang out of unfulfilled or violated relations, and to the adjustment of these relations His whole ministry was addressed. Between a life rightly and wrongly related to the eternal order there is the same difference as between a locomotive on or off the rails. The engine which is smooth and frictionless in its movement when rightly related to the permanent way for which it was made, will, if it leaves the track, only wreck its own beauty and utility. In proportion to its power will be the completeness

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of its ruin. Every plunge of the pistons, every revolution of the wheels, while off the road, will only increase the strain and damage of its parts. So with man. All the wheels of human life have been fitted and flanged for the rails of duty ; and, once we leave these, every faculty of mind and soul and body feels the additional strain. The repose of a perfectly frictionless and harmonious working of all the powers can be secured only along the lines of the divine purpose. We have the choice, then, not as to whether we shall run these lives of ours or not, but as to whether we shall run them along or athwart the lines of God's permanent way. We may choose, not whether we shall labour, but whether we shall labour under easy or distressing conditions—whether with cumbrous and ill-fitting gear that will scald and scar, or with the well-adjusted yoke of the Master, that will make the hardest draught easy and the heaviest burden light. It is entirely a question of adjustment to right relations with God.

‘The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’ This is Paul’s definition of the kingdom which we are called upon by Christ to seek. Without attempting to unfold all the contents of this definition, a very cursory examination will reveal how thoroughly the apostle is in harmony with his

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Lord. Look at the words for a moment. What is ‘righteousness’? Undoubtedly it is ‘rightness’—the all-round fulfilment of relations, first of all to God, and then, through God, to our brother-man. Here is provided ample scope for all life’s activities, because the kingdom of God roofs in all that is legitimate in the kingdom of man. Citizenship in the heavenly kingdom is the best qualification for discharging the duties of the earthly, and to place these two in opposition is to put asunder that which God intended to be joined.

Out of life thus rightly related springs ‘peace,’ and there is no peace where there is no righteousness. Men’s faces may wear the mask of peace, it is true; but where allegiance has not been handed in to the Supreme, there is the deeply-wrought consciousness of default within and of trouble ahead, for ‘there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.’

Then, too, there is ‘joy.’ Not joy in the animal spirits merely. We can all be happy in this sense, given our physical health and strength. Who does not know the joy of mere living—to get up on a spring morning, when the pure gold of dawn is boiling over the night’s cloudy brim, when the dew is sparkling like diamond-points from every blade of grass, and the air is fragrant with the wandering perfume of a thousand flowers? Who could not

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be happy on a morning like that—when even the calves feel the ecstasy of life? We have all known such mornings, when living was a rapture and we have shouted in a very delirium of joy. But that, after all, was merely joy in the animal spirits—a very short-lived and precarious thing, as brief and brittle in its tenure as ice on summer seas. A toothache could slay that joy in one moment! It has been known in some houses to be incapable of surviving even the exigencies of a cold dinner or a washing-day! But the joy of the kingdom is joy in the ‘Holy Spirit’—joy full and deep and unconfined—joy that is independent of all outward conditions, lifting us above all the distresses that are incident to the pilgrimage, and making human life chime in with the everlasting harmony. This, then, is the kingdom that we are called upon to seek and make our own.

We are now ready to look at some of Christ’s words in detail. First, let us examine the word ‘seek,’ because there are different methods of seeking. It is interesting to note that the word translated ‘seek’ in the text has for one of its meanings, if not for its primary significance, ‘to beat the covers for birds.’ It is the sportsman’s method of seeking. How does a sportsman seek? Many readers of these words will know from experience what it means in the way of work even

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under the most favourable conditions for a sportsman to fill his bag—how he must be prepared to wade swamps, climb uplands, push through brake and brier, watch, wait, wriggle, and in fact do everything but fail, for no sportsman worthy of the name cares to come back with an empty bag. If, however, he is to succeed, his whole soul must be in his quest. Hand and eye and ear must all be working in concert. For, note, it is ‘birds under cover’ to which the word relates, and, that being so, the bird is only up for a brief moment, and must be taken as it flies. What a startling suggestion is this—the kingdom of God like a bird on the wing! It is a passing thing—here now, and to-day within present sight and range; but it is speeding past, and we must take it as it flies lest to-morrow it should be ‘under cover,’ and ‘these things be hid from our eyes.’ Have you ever sought the kingdom of heaven as earnestly as you have sought the kingdom of sport? Believe me, if you had it would have been yours long ago to enjoy and serve. But you have thought that, while you must struggle for the kingdom of man and toil for the temporal with both hands, yet the kingdom of God was going to fall into your lap unsolicited, and all its wealth of power and privilege come to you unsought! Nay, you

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must seek it, and with every power on stretch, with every sense awake. Then, too, you must seek it ‘first.’ It must take precedence of every other search. We have seen in the case of the alien that to be seeking the rights and privileges of citizenship before first of all becoming a citizen is to pursue an inverted order. The fact is that the kingdom of God, like every other kingdom, has its laws and conditions, through which alone its chartered blessings can be claimed. It is not a question of passing from one locality to another; not a matter of latitude, but of attitude; not a question of position, but of disposition and temper towards the Crown. Of course, God’s kingdom is everywhere, and there is no square inch of the universe which does not fall within the rule of His sceptre. It is well to remember this. But just as an earthly kingdom may include those who repudiate its authority and defy its laws, and who have to be imprisoned and disciplined for disloyalty, so with the kingdom of God. God has His place of correction, but to deny His rule there would be as idle as to deny that the King of England rules in Reading Jail. That his rule is different in its spirit and method in the prison cell from what it is at Windsor or at Westminster is true. But that is because of the difference in spirit on the part of

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the ruled. The whole question resolves itself into a matter of personal adjustment to the will of the Ruler and King. Wherever there is loyalty in the will to the Supreme, there is the kingdom of God in its threefold benediction of ‘righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.’ This is what Christ meant when He said, ‘The kingdom of God is within you’: it is a matter of the interior life and its relation to the Sovereign of all worlds. It is the acceptance as the rule of conduct of His will to whom the allegiance of all wills is due. To discover that will and rightly relate oneself to it is obviously the first grand necessity. Moreover, there are some things, and this is one, which, if not sought first, it is no use seeking at all. The kingdom of God must have priority of all other search, and any other order will be vain.

The whole problem of right living resolves itself into a question of right order. It is this thought of order that is running through and governing the whole length and breadth of the context. Christ appeals to men’s sense of perspective and proportionate values. He simply asks them to pursue the common-sense policy of giving precedence to the highest claims. All the distress of life springs out of dislocation. Once it becomes reset and rightly related to its true centre, once it becomes

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curved to its divinely appointed orbit, it finds the line of least resistance. It is the line of relief, because it is the line of right adjustment, that is righteousness—or ‘rightness,’ as we have preferred to call it. Rightness in work performed and in wages paid. Not a sentimental thing for Sundays merely, easily soiled and frayed; but an everyday and strongly fibred texture that will stand the wear and tear of the world’s busy week without sign of strain or stain.

The righteousness of the kingdom is deeply inward, but for ever running outward like a network of moral nerves into all the multiplied relations of a man’s many-sided life, and rendering its possessor more keenly sensitive about safeguarding others’ rights than redressing his own wrongs. He becomes a patriot of the kingdom of God. But the patriotism of that kingdom takes the form of a passion for righteousness both in himself and in others—a passion for moral and not material ends. Here a wonderful transformation takes place. As soon as material concerns cease to be regarded as ends in themselves, but simply as means by which the ends of the kingdom are to be sought and served, they cease to be any longer material, and become moral in the first degree. It is a question not of change of work but of motive—not of operation but of

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objective. Citizenship in the kingdom of God in many cases may not necessitate the dropping of a single old practice, nor the taking up of a single fresh duty. It may simply involve the transfer from self to God of the whole life just as it is, with all its affairs in full working order as a going concern, and the placing of it under the control of the Crown, to be worked no longer for private and personal profit, but for far-reaching and imperial ends.

In this view of the matter the distinction between secular and sacred disappears entirely from the region of the work itself to emerge and take its only possible place in the mind and motive of the worker. In itself, no task can be either secular or sacred. It is from the spirit in which it is done that it alone derives its quality. The most outwardly religious function may, through being selfishly discharged, become desecrated into a basely secular act; while, on the other hand, the most menial and even loathsome task performed in the spirit of a self-effacing love may be transfigured into a high and sacred ministry. Any other view of our daily work must react disastrously on personal character. If a man has the notion that he is serving God only when he is at church or in the attitude of devotion, then he will by so much deprecate time spent in what he terms ‘secular pursuits.’ He will apologetically

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explain, when referring to his business, that ‘a man must live, you know!’ as though God did not know that a man must live; and he will go on to explain that ‘a man cannot be all the time serving God.’ But this is precisely what a man can do, and is doing, even when serving out tea and sugar, or delivering milk or meat—always, of course, assuming that he is giving standard weight and quality.

This is what men need to remember. But some man may say, ‘There are whole hours of the day in which I have not time to think of God and divine things.’ To which it may be rejoined that he is probably serving God all the more effectively when he is not thinking of Him, but putting all his strength of mind and heart into the task immediately in hand. When a man gets this view of his daily toil he will not fear losing his spirituality while occupied therein. Why should he? God is doing just as secular work as any of His creatures every day. He holds all the material concerns of His vast and various universe in His hands and in His mind. All the forces that we call ‘physical’ stream out from His infinite Personality. He is in touch with matter all the time, and in all its countless forms; but we do not suppose that in the process He loses any of His spirituality, or that He fences off His forces from each other and distinguishes them as ‘secular’ and ‘sacred.’

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Then why should man? Let him interpret his everyday work as a ministry to which he has been divinely called and ordained, regarding it, not as something antagonistic to or even apart from his religion, but rather as his religion applied to the duties of his daily life.

We come back, then, to the truth that the kingdom of God is not something opposed to the kingdom of man, but that through which the kingdom of man can alone be realized to its fullest and best. This, then, is the order—God first, and, through God, everything else. Accept this order, and the pyramid of life will rise grandly, solidly, and symmetrically to its apex ; invert it, and the structure will topple in ruins about your ears.

If men make fidelity to relations their care, God will make the commissariat His care. Listen to the apostle : ‘Casting all your care upon Him.’ Why? ‘Because He careth for you.’ That is to say, ‘He does the caring.’ If that be so, there is no need, even if there were any use, for us to assume it also. Christ is seeking to shift our anxiety from the question of provision to that of relation, because, that once established, the other need give us no concern. The children of our homes do not trouble themselves as to whence their next season’s food and raiment are to come. Sometimes, perhaps, we wish

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they would exercise a little more care, and thus save us expense. But, on the whole, what father would like to see his boys and girls, with tear-stained faces and melancholy mien, inquiring dolefully as to the prospect of future supplies? Would he not say at once: ‘Don’t be anxious about that; that is my care. Be anxious to please father and obey mother, and we’ll look after all the rest’?

Look at it in this way: Here is a little half-starved orphan who, some winter night, turns up at the back door of one of England’s many comfortable farms. Waiting till the men are well out of the way, he approaches one of the servant-maids and begs something to eat. She cuts him a liberal allowance, gives him permission to sleep in the barn, but bids him keep out of sight. In the early morning he is at the back door for another piece, and presently off again under cover of the barn. But that sort of thing cannot last long in a well-regulated farm; and so, during the day, the farmer visits the barn, and in the act of turning over some bags suddenly comes upon the boy, with the inquiry as to who he is and what he is doing there. The little fellow tells his tale of orphanhood and want. The farmer, looking keenly into the pale, pinched face of the lad, sees that the story is all too true. His big English heart goes out to him, as, with voice a trifle

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husky, he says: ‘Look here, my boy! I had a little chap once, just about as old as you, but he sleeps in the cemetery yonder, and I often lie awake at nights thinking of him. His clothes are in the chest of drawers; his pony is in the stable; and the things he used to play with are stored away. Now, I’ll tell you what I will do for you. If you will come into my house and be my boy, and do what I tell you, you shall take the place of the little lad that’s gone; because I think, somehow, it will please him to know that some one who needs them has the use of the things that he has left. Then, you see, you won’t have to travel round and pick up your living in this haphazard way at people’s back doors, but will have a home of your own.’ Can we conceive of any lad declining an offer like that? Yet how many men and women who will read these words are doing this very inconceivable thing! God comes to men and offers, if they will but accept of His regal Paternity and come into His home, and fulfil the obligations which this accepted privilege involves, He will take over the care of their life, and all they want to eat and drink and wear will come to them along the line of their fulfilled relations to Him. ‘But,’ say you, ‘I am getting all I want to eat and drink and wear as it is: and I am not by any means seeking first the kingdom of God.’ Then

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let me say that you are getting it, so to speak, at God’s back door, and you have no just right to it, nor guarantee of its permanence. ‘Well,’ you reply, ‘I work for it!’ Aye! But do you not see that, for every breath you draw, you are dependent on His bounty whose claims you disavow? Let me beseech you, establish your footing, fulfil your obligations, come into the home, stand up to your duties, put and keep yourself right with your Heavenly Father and King; and this new relationship, loyally accepted and frankly discharged, will give you the promise, not only of the life that now is, but also of that which is to come.

VII

The Centripetal Force of Love

Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.—LUKE xv. 1.

THE three parables which form the fifteenth chapter of Luke—the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son—have one purpose. They constitute Christ's vindication of His sympathetic attitude towards the social and moral outcasts of His day.

The fact was, Christ had a mission, and it was a mission which led Him straight past the self-complacent religionist, and, with a fine scorn of the conventional, brought Him face to face, hand to hand, and heart to heart with the moral derelicts of the time. These were the men and women He had come to seek and to save. Those who had become enslaved to evil habit, those whose very kindness of disposition and geniality of soul had laid them open to temptations to which the unsociable and taciturn are never exposed, and those

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with whom the orthodox formalist of the Church had long since fallen out, and would have nothing whatever to do.

This was the class that crowded to His ministry, and they did it because He gave them hope. Not that He stood for any particular type, but for man as man. He taught the doctrine of an eternal and universal Father, whose heart of love He had come to reveal. He placed Himself in swift and ready sympathy with men, as a man among men. They caught a tone of brotherliness in His teaching which brought them in crowding thousands to His feet. Under the spell of His influence the best that was in them was evoked. Morally diseased humanity, that seemed impervious to feeling and dead to every noble impulse, quickened into activity under His touch, and showed, by its power of loving Him, its capacity to assimilate new life. The manhood and the womanhood that was slipping away from its possessors, and in which they themselves had almost ceased to believe, was recalled, reinstated, and reinforced by His word. He recovered for the outcasts their self-respect by treating them as brother-men and sister-women, and the very lowest of them He linked up with the possibility of all that was highest and best. He delivered them from despair. He gave them to feel that, so long as there was in them

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the sense of need and the capacity to love, there was every hope of higher things. Christ not only taught these great truths by word of mouth—He translated them into acts of life. He was their living embodiment and expositor. He was message and messenger in one—God's glorious gospel done into flesh and blood, 'the Word made flesh' and dwelling among men.

Now, what is a word but the expression of a thought, a purpose, a feeling? And so all God's great thoughts, purposes, and feelings for humanity, that for centuries had been struggling for expression in prophecy and psalm, gathered themselves up and visualized and vocalized themselves in the life and character and death of the Incarnate Word. Here is the great differentiating fact separating the religion of Jesus Christ from the other religions of the world. In all other systems we see man seeking after God, striving to propitiate God, endeavouring to appease God, feeling after if haply they may find God. But in Jesus Christ all this is reversed. Here we have God seeking man, appealing to man, pleading with man, following man in all his widest wanderings and down to his deepest depths, with beseeching words of invitation and assurances of recovery and hope.

What a gospel for sinful men and women! Here

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is the Infinite Love, flowing out from the bosom of the Father, taking human shape, assuming human hands and feet, human eyes and lips, a human heart and a human brain, and speaking to men in the dear words of human speech. It is this gospel of the Son of God, in all the boundlessness of its breadth, in all the wealth of its tenderness, and in all the might of its hopefulness, that the Church of Jesus Christ is called upon not only to preach, but to articulate in character and life. When she does this there will draw near unto her, as there did unto Christ, all the publicans and the sinners to hear her, and, hearing, they will find healing for their sorrows and pardon for their sin.

Christ's Church is Christ's body. It is the visible and tangible organism through which He seeks to come into touch with men. Its hands are to be His hands, its feet His feet, its voice His voice. Think for a moment what it would mean for the world if this ideal were but realized, and defeated men and despairing women were only made to feel that, in coming into the Christian Church, they were being enfolded with the arms of Christ, breathing the atmosphere of Christ, listening to the voice of Christ, were being held to His beating heart and strengthened with His strength! Oh, if the Church did but 'mother' men and women as Jesus did,

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think you it would ever have to face the problem of empty seats?

This is the kind of Church which Christ died to create and lives to energize. Shall it disappoint Him, and by its selfishness be disrated and displaced? What the human body is to the human mind, that the Church is to the divine mind. 'As we have many members in one body . . . so we, being many, are one body in Christ.' In the normal human body there is perfect co-ordination between the directing mind and the responding members, so that obedience is prompt and full. But where is the Christian Church that answers to the will of God as a man's hands and feet answer to his commanding brain? Will any Church dare to pretend that Christ has the same use of all its members for the purpose of expressing the mind and heart of God as the human mind has of all its bodily members to express the will of man?

Alas! instead of Christ possessing in His Church an instrument flexible, capable, adaptable, through which the manifold grace of God may express itself in rich and multiplied ministries of love, His Spirit has been too often hedged in and hampered by creeds and customs till it could not become visible, audible, or tangible in the body that bore His name.

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What His earthly body became as a medium of divine manifestation and method of approach to men, that He desires His Church to become. That first incarnation was necessarily local, limited, and temporary; this second incarnation is to be universal and abiding. Just as in the advent of Christ God came to manifestation in an individual life, so in the advent of His Church He seeks to come to manifestation in corporate life. It is this perpetually recurring incarnation of the Christ-spirit in every group of true believers that alone can make the Church's contact with men effective. And there must be contact in order to uplift. The world is to be saved by contact. Listen again to the text: 'Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.' 'Then.' When? Look back into the previous chapter. Clearly this marks a point of time, and also a logical sequence. Luke observes chronological order and logical sequence more than the other synoptists. He clearly puts this fifteenth chapter in relation to the fourteenth, out of which he makes it flow. Christ, in the closing part of the fourteenth chapter, is speaking of salt. 'Salt is good,' He says. But how is salt good? Only by contact. The idea of contact is in Christ's mind; nor can we doubt that, in the symbol of the salt, He was setting forth primarily His own influence on society, and, secondarily,

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that of His disciples. So that here the important truth emerges that the Church is to be not merely passively pure, but actively purifying. A piece of quartz crystal may be as pure as a crystal of salt, but it is not purifying ; it exerts no saving influence ; it radiates no redeeming force. Its purity is for itself alone. It converts no contiguous clay into its own rare and stainless beauty. But it is not so with a crystal of salt. It immediately sets up salutary relations with its surroundings. It seeks that it may save, and gives itself away in the process. This is the sacrificial element which the symbol sets forth. We, too, must give ourselves away if we are to save. What is true of salt is true also of light, another of Christ's symbols of His Church. It is shed at the cost of sacrifice. The candle burns out its very life in shedding its light. Even the great sun in the heavens has a measurable life, and science has computed the number of his years. Every ray that throbs down to us from his mighty heart represents, so to speak, an expenditure of his life-blood. He dies that we may live. There is no other way. Christ could find no other. To save men He had to empty Himself, to give Himself away. And He did it. He laid aside His glory, stepped down from His throne, out from the spacious ranges of the eternities which were His home, into the limitations of time.

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'He made Himself of no reputation ; He took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name ; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' 'A name above every name.' What is that name ? Why, 'Jesus,' which signifies 'Saviour.' There is no higher name than this on earth or in heaven. We reserve our highest honours for those who, in order to become saviours of men, give themselves away ; and if we would be saviours we too must give ourselves away. Not merely our money, but ourselves. We must die to self, and, by so doing, raise men on stepping-stones of our dead selves to higher things.

VIII

The Logic of Love

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?—LUKE xv.

THIS is the 'Lost and Found' chapter of the New Testament. The Parable of the Lost Sheep forms one of a group of three, which together converge to a single point. They were arranged and delivered with a view to cumulative effect. The loss of a human soul and the joy over its recovery are here set forth from the divine side of the question, and not from the human view-point at all. The owner's sense of loss and satisfaction at reclamation are here taken up and illustrated by Christ. It is the logic of moral proprietorship called in to vindicate the Divine Seeker's sympathetic attitude towards the moral and social outcasts of His day.

That a vindication was necessary serves as a revealing sidelight to the character of Christ's critics and their Messianic ideals. From their murmurs,

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as recorded by the evangelist, we gather their conception of what Christ should have been and done. They were just as shocked at His companionships as the orthodox Churchman of to-day would be if Christ should come to one of our great cities and set up friendly relations with a Licensed Victuallers' Association, or accept an invitation to dine with the members of a racing club. That this, or something similar, is precisely what Christ would do if He came there can be no manner of doubt, for where should He be if not where He is needed most? Where should the moral physician be in attendance if not where there is moral disease to be cured?

Instead, therefore, of fulfilling the Pharisaic expectation, and becoming the bigoted partisan of a sect or the patron of a privileged class, Christ made Himself the human-hearted Friend and Brother of every sinful man and erring woman and helpless little child. Of course, in the view of His critics, He was thereby morally compromised. They would have had Him withdraw Himself apart and give no audience to the socially impossible and morally unclean. This was their own invariable method, and right successfully had it worked in teaching the outcasts their place, and cleaving a great gulf between the masses and the Church.

But the theory that the Church existed for the

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orthodox, respectable, and nose-in-the-air conformists who looked with Pharisaic contempt on what they were pleased to call the 'unwashed,' was precisely the theory that Christ had come to explode. He came to bridge the gulf between the Church and the people, and for Him to have gained one profligate life from the abyss would have thrilled Him with a deeper and diviner joy than to have captured the patronizing sanction of the entire Sanhedrin, with all their priests and Levites thrown in.

But these parables are not merely a setting forth of how God feels towards the erring, but also of how He acts. It is a vindication of method, and an illustration of divine tact. Clearly, if men are to be saved they must be followed, they must be sought, they must be gone after and got into touch with. There is positively no other way. Christ could find no other. The lost sheep of the parable had not a hope unless the shepherd had gone forth in search of it.

Picture his look of concern as he is about to lead his flock homeward to the fold, to escape, it may be, the gathering storm, and finds, on taking tally, that one of the number has strayed. He swiftly scans their faces that he may know the missing one by name. Then, leaving the ninety and nine in the care of his hireling, he turns his back on home

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and warmth and food to face the threatening night, for this is work that he will entrust to no eye or ear, to no hand or foot, save his own.

See him as he hastens for the solitude of the mountain, picking his steps along narrow pass and through lonesome glen ; now clambering craggy steeps from whose summits, 'straining his eyes beneath an arch of hand,' he fain would catch some traces of the strayed one, and then descending slippery slopes that lend no foothold ; here forcing his way through tangle of brush and brake and brier, and there hurrying through dismal wastes where the black water lies in sullen blotches, answering back with frowns the scowling sky. Now for a moment he pauses to call the lost one by its name, and strains his accustomed ear to catch its answering bleat. Then on again, through dark ravine and over windy wold, with a great fear clutching at his heart lest some evil beast have already made the wanderer his prey, but with a greater hope that will not die giving spring to his step and keenness to his every sense, till at length there comes the welcome cry that lends wings to his feet, and swiftly guides him to the lost one's side. Then behold him as, torn with bramble and bruised with stones, he forgets his pain and weariness in the tumult of his thankful joy, and, with many caresses, brings the wanderer home.

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So the Great Shepherd of your souls and mine turned His back on home and comfort, and sought the wilderness land, that, through pain and tears and blood, He might find the track of our wandering feet—

And bring us home upon His shoulders laid.

In the case of the shepherd and the sheep in this parable there was, of course, distance in the sense of space to be covered. The sheep had strayed and had to be overtaken in a physical sense. This element, however, does not enter into the question of the soul's relation to God. In the matter of mere locality, the lowest sinner is as near to God as the highest saint. There is no distance, in the sense of ground to be traversed, separating the vilest offender from the loving Shepherd of souls. All such terms as 'lost,' 'seek,' 'find,' 'bring home,' &c., have to be translated into their moral equivalents. We cannot conceive that man is lost in any sense of being outside the circle of the divine ken or care. He holds us all in His view, and the only distance is moral distance—distance of feeling. We know what this is in our human relations. Men may be distant, even in the shaking of hands. It is distance in the sense of apathy or antipathy—a want of sympathetic relation.

Now, clearly, to seek such a soul involves the

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breaking down of moral barriers or the bridging of moral intervals. It is getting into saving touch with those who have somehow dropped out of relation with the highest and best. But where the moral sympathies have become dull through perversion or disease, it becomes necessary to make an appeal to feelings lower down the scale. It is of no use striking chords that have lost their power to respond. Christ therefore commenced where He could with men. He got into touch with them on the social plane, because, had He come along the moral, He would have missed them. They were not dwelling there. He accommodated Himself to their level. He ate with them, drank with them, talked with them, and went out of His way, so to speak, to gain their confidence. He was always accessible to them. He did not fence Himself off from them, nor gird Himself about with an air of repellent reticence. He never made men feel that it was a great condescension on His part to notice them. There was nothing patronizing in His manner, but a frank brotherliness that won their confidence and made them feel that here was a man who understood them, one who woke up the best that was in them and gave them hope.

But Christ's search for men did not cease with the close of His brief but busy life. That earthly

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search was but a local and transient expression of a universal and perpetual ministry. It was merely the emergence into temporary visibility, and on the stage of the world's history, of a search from which Christ has never rested nor will ever rest night or day till again, and in another sense, He is able to say, 'It is finished!' because He has brought the last one home.

In pursuance of this search He comes to the wilderness of each man's life and calls him by his name. He is for ever seeking, for ever on the track of the wanderer, with feelings delicately attuned, with sensibilities keenly alive to the faintest response, and with a hope which His love, because it is infinite, will not permit to die.

He is always with us, pushing His persistent way into the field of our thought that, perchance, He may discover and arouse the slumbering divinity, the lost manhood and womanhood which He died to save and lives to empower. He knows the futility, the folly of our seeking happiness along the paths of sense, and He would fain save us, Good Shepherd that He is, from the disappointments that break the heart and the bewilderments that breed despair.

O men and women, listen! Have you been misled and betrayed? Have you been allured by false voices and seduced from right paths by the whispers

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of sense? Have you been tempted into what promised to be a flowery and fragrant mead, but which has turned out to be a burnt and barren waste? Then I have been sent to tell you that into this waste Christ has followed you lovingly, longingly, and calls you by name. O the beauty of Him! that even with the stain of our sin upon us and the Dead Sea fruit of our folly turning to dust and ashes between our teeth, with the honours we have gathered withering on our brow, and the sense of desolation embittering our lives—even then He does not reproach us. When we turn to Him in the thick of our disappointment, in the very depth of our disillusionment, when this gaudy world has ceased to charm, when its pleasures pall upon the taste, and we are deadly weary of the hollow and painted show—even then, instead of treating us with a cold disdain or turning from us with an 'I-told-you-how-it-would-be' kind of air, He bends over the broken and disappointed spirit and says, 'O child of My love, this is the moment I have been waiting for. I knew it would come. I knew that you would find the world out. I tried to tell you, but you would not listen. But listen now:

Come unto Me and rest;
Lay down, thou weary one, lay down
Thy head upon My breast.'

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Then, folding us to His heart of love, and feeling the pain of our disappointment as though it were His own, He heals us of our grievous wounds, and, almost before we ask Him, grants us pardon for our sin. O the wealth of His tenderness, the hopefulness of His pity, the resourcefulness of His love, and the infinite reach of His rescuing and reinstating grace! Like the shepherd of the parable, He seeks until He finds. He is out to-night on this quest: He will be out to-morrow night, and the night after that. He is not coming home till the last sheep has been found and folded. Till then there will be no rest for Him. Men and women, this is the Saviour that you need. He stands over against the threshold of every defiled and desolated life, and waits for entrance. Only let Him in, and He will turn its barren waste into a garden, and make its desolation to blossom as the rose.

IX

The Persistence of Love

Either what woman, having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?—LUKE xv. 8.

IN our last study we were dealing with the lost sheep. We saw how, under cover of that parable, Christ was setting forth the seeking and saving love of God—that love which feels the pain of loss, and keeps on seeking night and day, knowing no rest until it finds and brings its lost one home. The purpose of Christ in these three parables, as we have previously stated, is to set forth the misery of loss and the joy of recovery, entirely from the divine side. As a matter of fact, the first parable should not be called the Parable of the Lost Sheep, because this throws the emphasis precisely where Christ did not place it. Nothing could have been further from His purpose than to fix the attention on the one that was lost. It is the Parable of the Seeking Shepherd; for this is the truth that is designed to be thrust into relief. Lest there should

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be any lingering doubt as to the one-sidedness of this search, or as to whether the initial movement is from God towards man, He supplements the Parable of the Seeking Shepherd and the Lost Sheep with that of the Seeking Housewife and the Lost Coin. A further reason may be found in the fact that Christ's critics might have replied, if not audibly, yet mentally, that, were the publicans with whom He was consorting as conscious as even a silly sheep of being lost and needing salvation, there might have been some justification for His attitude and method. For a sheep, silly though it be, knows when it is out of hand, and its further plunges into the unknown are simply expressions of its fear of being alone. But these men and women with whom Christ ate, and drank, and talked had cut themselves adrift from all the sweet and sacred pieties of life, and were openly and notoriously bad. Of course, it would never occur to the Pharisees and Scribes that they themselves, by reason of their self-righteous pride and unsympathetic attitude, had been the means of driving these moral pariahs into more determined revolt against everything connected with religion and the Church. They simply noted the fact of their moral estrangement, making no effort to ascertain the cause or to turn back their wandering feet.

Had one of these lapsed ones turned of his own

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accord, and sought, by sacrifice and penitence and prayers, reinstatement to his forfeited rights and privileges, doubtless these spiritual chiefs would have received him with a frigid reserve, and with such austerity of manner as they felt would suitably mark the moral interval between themselves and him and their moral disapproval of his past. But as for going out on anything like a search for a straying soul, and setting up sympathetic relations with it, to the end that it might be saved, the idea had never occurred to them, and would only have awokened in them a sense of revulsion if it had.

The missing coin may be taken as representing a lower stage of loss—a more advanced condition of moral deterioration—than a missing sheep. The sheep would at least be conscious of having wandered, but the coin knew nothing ; it was dead to the degradation of being trampled in the dust. The Pharisees might have reasoned that, were there in these outcasts a sense of loss, a consciousness of danger, and a cry for help, then Christ might have been excused. But they were so steeped in selfishness and sin, so dead to every noble instinct, that it was indeed 'Love's labour lost' to waste such solicitude over them. Wait till they ask and seek, wait till the situation becomes so intolerable that they themselves will cry out ; and if such time never comes, well, let

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them descend to the Tophet for which they have qualified; but do not degrade the dignity of the divine by stooping to such cattle as these.

Now, it is the glory of the gospel of Christ that it does not wait till men betray desire. It comes down to them and stands over against them in all its rare and radiant loveliness, that it may beget desire. It fosters the good that is ready to perish, it fans the flame of dying hope, it shines in upon the uncomprehending darkness that perchance it may rouse from its torpor the slumbering conscience and reinforce the palsied will. This gospel Christ embodied in His own matchless and winsome personality, and what He did He wants His Church to go on doing until His coming again. Christ is so in love with humanity that He wants it to know. He sees the possible angel in men, and longs to evoke it. This can be done only by love. Men have to be loved into goodness. This second parable, then, was designed to meet the objection felt, if not expressed, that until people betray a consciousness of having done wrong, and a desire to repent, there is no need to go out in search of them.

In spite of many contrasts that might be set up between this parable and that of the lost sheep, we must not allow our minds to be diverted from the main purpose of these parables, which is to typify

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the untiring search of God for that which He has lost. The truth that Christ is all the time aiming at setting in such relief is that God cares for the individual—that it is the lost one who is engaging His thought, and that even if there were but one wandering child out in the night it would justify His going out upon His saving search. The highest expression of life is love, the highest expression of love is sacrifice, and the highest expression of sacrifice is death. ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend.’

The divine sensibility to grief must be as infinite in its possibilities as any other of God’s capacities. He that made the heart, shall He not feel? He that has woven this complex system of nerves in our human organism, nerves that thrill with pleasure and quiver with pain, must Himself possess a delicacy of thought and feeling as much beyond the most exquisite human sensibility as this is beyond that of the lowest bivalve in its ocean bed! The heartache that the mother feels over her wandering boy or girl is only the palest reflex of God’s great sorrow for the sins of men—a sorrow that He bears perpetually on His heart. It is the recovery of the lost manhood in men and the lost womanhood in women, covered over with all manner

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of moral dust and débris, that is taxing the heart and the brain of God.

To restore the will to its regal place and power, to rescue it from the thraldom of evil habit, to turn the current of the affections into new channels, to get men and women to believe that it is of some use trying to be good, and that God cares—cares indeed so much that to Him nothing else really matters—this is the aim and the effort of the Christ. Such, in His estimation, is the value of a single human soul that its salvation is sufficient to kindle the rapture of the skies, while its development into a God-like character is the all-sufficient end to which the whole creation moves. What are suns and systems, with all their blazing splendours, compared with manhood and mind? They are simply soul-less matter, resolvable into solids or liquids or gases at the breath of His mouth. He has only to speak, and ten thousand flaming suns that are not will leap into being, or ten thousand that are will lapse back into the chaos from whence they came. These only make demands upon His infinite wisdom and power. But the redemption of the soul, the building up of character into likeness to the divine, calls for all He is and all He has, drawing on all His resources of mind and heart and hand. Nor are they withheld or economized :

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they are all and always available in the Son of His love who 'came to seek and to save that which was lost.'

He is near to the lowest, seeking within them for the perishing spiritual quantity, the lessening capacity for the divine, the vanishing ideals of purity and truth. This is a quest worthy indeed of a God —requiring the exhaustless patience and infinite forbearance of a God. It is a quest in which the Divine is seeking for His own affinity in man. There are men and women who read these words who are simply the graves of dead and buried ideals. They can bring up recollections of fair and noble purposes that perished at the birth. The might-have-beens of their life stand like grim accusers in the chambers of the memory, and refuse to be gone. The devil who deluded them with lying assurances that there would be plenty of time and spacious opportunity for retrieval now sits at their elbow and tells them that they have not a hope.

But if he was a liar at the beginning of man's mistaken career, he is a liar doubly damned to-day, because there is every hope, for we have to do with the 'God of hope.' He stands above the grave of your dead and buried purposes, bidding them come forth and blossom from their very dust, for even of perished purposes He is the 'Resurrection and the

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Life.' 'Behold,' He says, 'I make all things new.' This is what He is for ever doing, wherever we will let Him—taking even the waste product of our fallen humanity and transforming it to the image of the divine. And the secret of it all is Love. Christ is in love with men, and that which He loves He must seek and save. He sees the possible, and longs to make it actual. Nothing can achieve this but love; but it can and it will, for love never fails. It holds on its own patient, persuasive, persistent way. No coldness can chill it, no hardness discourage, no opposition break it down. It is infinite in its resourcefulness and eternal in the patience with which it endures. Love will yet be victorious over all evil. But until the last triumph has been achieved and the last child brought home, the yearning of the Father's heart will be unsatisfied and the gladness of His household incomplete.

X

The Triumph of Love

And He said: A certain man had two sons, &c.—LUKE xv. 11-32.

IT is, we fear, a hopeless task to attempt at this late date to change the title of this parable, and call it, what it undoubtedly is, the Parable of the Prodigal's Father. But, as in the case of both the previous parables, the present designation succeeds in throwing into deep perspective precisely the very element which Christ was desirous of thrusting into the foreground—the watching, waiting, welcoming love of God.

The parable is one with which we are all familiar, and it has always had a fascination for the mind and heart of man, not merely because of the grand redemptive truths which it illustrates, but because it is a picture of home. Now nothing could be easier, if desirable, than to depict the life of the prodigal when freed from all restraint, and the moral degradation and social cleavage that his course induced. There is plenty of scope for imaginative treatment

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in tracing his career from deep to deep, till he who was by birth and rank a freeman became the hireling of an alien and reduced to feeding swine. But the purpose of the parable, as we have said, is not so much to set forth the degradation of the son as the frank and full forgiveness of the father, and the household joy at the wanderer's return.

We know all about the dark background of the picture. We see enough of it, God knows, and are not allowed to forget it if we would. All around us we are daily witnessing the deterioration and undoing that sin is working, till we are almost driven to despair, and led to cry, 'To what purpose is this waste?' In certain moods we are inclined to question whether God knows or cares, whether there is any moral goal towards which human life is tending, or whether the whole thing is not a weltering chaos 'without a conscience or an aim.' It is the bright foreground of divine solicitude and all-patient hope that we need to see as a corrective to this view, and the knowledge that, as the prodigal world grows weary of its wandering, and hungry for rest and home, it is welcomed back to the Father's house and folded to the Father's beating heart. This is the truth that our parable is designed to teach, and what father who stood among that listening crowd and heard that story could remain untouched?

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Here was no far-fetched illustration from Egypt or Persia, from Greece or Rome, but one an example of which almost every family circle could furnish, then as now—the restless spirit that grows impatient of restraint, that imagines licence to be liberty, and forgets, or never learns except through loss of peace and purity, that it is the wise and wholesome restraint of liberty that can alone conserve its finest fruits, and that 'freedom in the bounds of law' alone can make for blessedness.

This parable is brimming over with divinest hope. Under cover of an earthly fatherhood, Christ is setting forth the infinite Fatherhood of God. No other relationship could adequately express the truth, and even this falls short, infinitely short, of the reality that is sought to be symbolized.

The relation of a shepherd to his sheep was, of course, both close and tender; the attachment of a woman to the symbol of her husband's pledged affection and fidelity would be deep and strong. But, after all, we have to enter the circle of the family relations to find the most perfect expression of solicitous and self-sacrificing love. The selection of the younger son as the erring one is a tender touch, giving an additional pathos to the story, and doubtless was designed to set forth more fully the tenderness of the father's overflowing love. In every home the

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younger son holds a peculiarly sacred place in the parents' hearts. If, in addition, as may be justly inferred from the silence of the parable, the mother of the lad was dead, then he would be doubly dear to the father's heart. Thus every element that could possibly be introduced to deepen the sense of the father's desolation has been pressed into use in order that in the end it may serve to measure the height of the household joy. Let every man and woman who reads these lines endeavour, with such imagination as they possess, to look into that home during the absence of that younger boy, with the father watching and waiting by day and the light kept burning at night, and to remember that this is what God's home is while they are away, and what it must continue to be till they return.

How the world's great sorrow must press upon the heart of God! Have you ever thought of what a heart it must be to carry it all? Think of the human misery and heartache that heave and sob and moan through all the great cities of the world. Think of the cruelties perpetrated by men and women whose passions have been set on fire of hell, the sufferings of helpless women, defenceless girls, and little children at the hands of inhuman monsters that make us men blush for our sex. Look at the extremes of indolent wealth and struggling poverty, of hoarding covetous-

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ness and profligate waste. Think on the problem of the unemployed and unemployable in our great cities, the shiftless and thriftless, the vicious and intemperate, the inefficient and unclean. Think of the criminal waste of child life in both negative and positive infanticide, and then call to mind the heart-breaking slowness with which the race moves upward in the moral scale,—and tell me, is it not enough to turn the brain and break the heart of even God Himself?

Oh the tragedy and pathos of it all! How He must sometimes wish He had never brought men into being who could wander so far and sink so low, and give both Him and themselves such more than mortal pain! Indeed, a note of regret is represented as being struck away far back in the cold grey dawn of history and the twilight of the race. Listen to it: 'And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.' But that was only at the start, so to speak. Then what must He feel to-day? For, remember, we see only a fraction; He sees the whole. We only for threescore years and ten; He through all the slow and torturing centuries, with their unspeakable record of misery and pain. We dare not dwell upon it lest it should make us mad. But He has to dwell on it. Night and day, through all the weary wasting years, He keeps His ceaseless vigil, listening to the cry of the suffering

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ages. And to think of how helpless He is, that He can only wait for man's return ! He has covered the whole distance to the very threshold of our lives, but He cannot take another step without violating the sanctity of the will, that all His moral attributes are pledged to protect and preserve.

Men and women, you have no distance to travel to get home. God is close to you, waiting to enfold you in warm and loving embrace. You have never, in all your widest and most woful wandering, been able to get away from His overarching, underspreading, all-encompassing love. That love is waiting, whispering, wooing even now. Listen to its plaint—for it is a plaint : ' My son, my daughter, give Me thine heart ! ' This is the cry of wounded, yearning, unreciprocated love. It is the hunger of the Almighty Father for the home-coming of His children. It is the sense of desolation from God's side finding expression. Have you ever thought of this—that no one else can fill your place in the heart and home of God ?

We have been endeavouring, by the aid of these three parables, to realize to our own consciousness the intensity of the divine longing for humanity's return to the bosom of the Father's heart and home. We have seen how faintly even the highest expression of earthly fatherhood sets forth the paternity of God. But for all that the instinct is a true one which

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reasons up from the heart of the human to that of the divine. It bears the endorsement of Jesus. Again and again does He take the earthly parent's love and thought for his children for the purpose of showing by 'how much more' the affection of the Heavenly Parent transcends the purest and most self-sacrificing love of earth. The love of the most perfect earthly home is but a shadow of the heavenly which it is intended to type. But Christ takes hold of it and turns it into a window, through which we get a glimpse of the Fatherhood Divine.

There is, however, a social and family side to this joy of recovery which must not be left out of view, because in each of the parables it occupies a prominent place.

In the case of the lost sheep and the lost coin it is clearly implied that the friends and neighbours of the respective losers were apprised of and saddened by the loss. For unless they had been made in some way sharers in the distress, they would hardly have been invited to celebrate the joy. This mutual concern, this common interest, culminating in a common joy, is one of the constants among all the variants of these parables, and it is not without significance.

It is intended to set forth the household solicitude, the family interest, in bringing the lost one home.

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The very expostulation of the father with the elder son serves only to show, by the discord his action induced, how otherwise unanimous was the rapture, and how churlish was the disposition that declined to harmonize with the general joy. But the discordant note that is struck in the elder brother's refusal only serves to heighten the general effect and accentuate the tumult of the gladness to which the entire household abandons itself. The impression produced upon us by the elder brother's attitude is one of impatience, and what is this but the universal instinct endorsing the action of the father, and the family delight at the wanderer's return?

There is not one of us who does not feel that the father of the prodigal was right. It is a case in which the cold judgement of the reason is felt to be an impertinence. Reason has no status in this court. It is not qualified to plead. The facts are such as it is not competent to handle or weigh. Its opinion upon them is about as valuable as that of the ear on a matter of colour, or that of the eye on sound. It simply does not belong to the function of reason to deal with this question. It lies utterly outside its realm. You cannot reason with love. You cannot pack it into a syllogism and make it tread the slow steps of a reasoning process. It will not listen to your logic, for the

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very good reason that it has a safer logic of its own—swift, conclusive, and assuring as light. People do not reason themselves into love, and if you have ever tried to reason any one out of it you will have proved the futility of the task. Indeed, it is frequently love's utter scorn of reason, its sweet and beautiful unreasonableness, that constitutes its most potent and attractive charm.

If you want to prove the impotence of all reasoning in such a case, talk to that mother who waits and watches and weeps for the return of her wandering boy. Tell her that he is unworthy of such a love, that he is a hopeless waster, and that she is throwing away her affection on an ingrate. Prove to her that her conduct is most unreasonable, and that she had better dry her eyes and wipe the memory of his existence from her mind and heart. You might as well talk to Niagara, and bid it cease to flow because of the rocky reception that it meets on its descent. You might as well tell the sun to cease from shining on the granite hills because they make no response in verdure to his warmth. Niagara flows because it must; the sun shines because it must; and a mother's love, like God's great love, flows out because it must, however unreasonable it may seem, and however unworthy and unresponsive its object may be.

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The twofold truth that Christ here sets like a double star in the firmament of His teaching is: first, the value of the individual soul to God; and secondly, its value through God to the all-world society which He has been busy organizing ever since the firstborn seraph flashed into being at the breath of His mouth.

A man must be saved as an individual; but, being saved, he is immediately introduced to and made part of a vast social organism with which he comes into relation through the gateway of his return to God. Neither he nor it can be perfected apart. He waits for it, albeit unconsciously. It waits for him consciously, expectantly, longingly. Every newly incorporated soul adds to the sum of its happiness and brings nearer the full and final consummation of its joy. The divine ideal is the organic completeness of the family—the perfected fellowship of all souls in one great and all-embracing household, with no single wanderer lost.

We have seen what must be the divine distress at the awful tragedy of discordant wills in antagonistic relation to His own. But God is not alone in this sorrow. Paul shows us the 'whole creation groaning and travailing in pain,' and 'waiting' for the emergence into birth of the newer and diviner order toward which the whole creation moves. Here there is a

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clear admission that in some mysterious way all life, from the lowest to the highest, has been set in the minor key through the perversity of the human will. Man's fall has struck a spasm of pain and discord through all the ranks of being, and only with his restoration can the forfeited harmony be regained. But if, as Christ declares, the joy of the heavenly host can be enhanced by a single soul's return, then clearly it is being reduced by every soul that remains an exile from the Father's house. If we can add to, we can subtract from, the sum of heaven's joy. The absence of any one of us is sufficient to depress the heart of that world with the sense of loss. Its full and final joy depends on our being home. For this they wait. Thus, then, we have the waiting God, the waiting heaven, and the waiting earth. 'Waiting the adoption,' that is, the restoration of dislocated relations, the reclamation and manifestation of all the prodigal sons of God.

With what grandeur does this invest the individual life! We are not merely the children of time, imprisoned within its limitations; mere bundles of sensations, or gleams of phosphorescent light flashing for a brief moment only to fade into the nothingness from whence we came. We are the children of the eternities, out of which we have come and into which we return. We belong not merely to the local and

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temporary order, but to the universal and abiding. We are the sons and daughters of the Eternal Love—the children of His heart and His home. He hungers for our home-coming, and our return is as much a necessity to the rest and satisfaction of His heart as it is to that of ours. When this prodigal world, the youngest of God's creation, grows weary of its wandering and turns its face towards home, the heavens will ring again with rapture, and all the elder sons of God shout for joy.

We are the objects of their most loving solicitude, their most anxious concern. We are the subjects of ten thousand tender ministries at their hands. Not one of them but is enlisted in the work of facilitating our home-coming. Not one of us but has his guardian angel—his ministering spirit—always in attendance and touching him with gentle hands; while, brooding over all, there hovers the enfolding Spirit of God, tremulous with love too strong and deep for words.

All heaven is out on this quest for the lost. Banish the thought, if you ever entertained it, that the angels are enjoying themselves in calm-browed and passionless aloofness from the sins and sorrows of earth. Theirs is no cold and distant, or unrelated sphere, but one which envelopes our own as an atmosphere, close, clinging, and kindly in its warm and tender

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embrace. 'Unto which of the angels said He at any time, Sit thou on My right hand?' They have no time to sit till their task is finished, till the last sheep has been safely folded, and the last child is home.

There is a beautiful significance in the fact that the Parable of the Lost Sheep in Matthew's Gospel (xviii. 10-14) has been placed in direct relation to the ministry of the angel host. 'See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. . . . How think ye? If any man have a hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and go unto the mountains, and seek that which goeth astray? And if so be that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth over it more than over the ninety and nine which have not gone astray. Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.'

Here, then, is the angel standing over every child with beckoning finger. Here is the ideal over against the actual, calling it up and seeking to absorb and transform it into its own rare and stainless beauty. The inference from this passage is not only fair but inevitable, that this is angels' work—to follow and ensphere us; bending over us with white wings outspread, entering through the doorways of our thought

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that they may turn our thinking upward to pure and lofty themes, quickening our holiest instincts and leading them to the heights. These spiritual presences surround us with the warm and fragrant breath of that unseen holy out of which they have come, and into which they will not finally return till at close of day they each can say, 'I have brought my lost ones home.'

Brother, sister, your good angel is ever with you. You have never gone wrong without having had to struggle against him. Like Balaam, you have had to push past him in your path to wrong. You have had to turn a deaf ear to his pleading, and trample down the holy feelings he evoked. But though you have done this a thousand times, you are followed and attended still. You are not alone. You are not abandoned ; you are not going to be. Man may give you up ; you may even give yourselves up ; but God will never give you up. Though you may despair, yet He hopes on, for He is the 'God of hope.' His hope, like every other lovely quality of His adorable nature, must be infinite in its reach and eternal in its power to endure. It can therefore never suffer either His patience to give out or His efforts to flag, His courage to droop or His expectation to die. Because God is Love He will never give in ; for love never despairs. 'It beareth all

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things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Nor is it merely passive in its endurance, but unrestingly active, exhausting every method to realize its inextinguishable hope. It will outwear and outlive the everlasting hills. 'The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall never depart from thee, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee.'

God has so set His heart on us that He will spare no pains either on His part or on ours to bring us home. He will press into His service personal misery, family bereavement, social discord, and a thousand conflicting and confounding experiences in order to head us off from false and forbidden paths ; and so sicken us of our wandering as to make us face about towards the goals of His beneficent desire.

The physical creation was preceded by a chaos vast and void, and the record of the rocks reveals that through mighty convulsions and cataclysms was this earth prepared to be the abode of life. Then followed age-long discords, with

Dragons of the prime
Tearing each other in their slime ;

but all predicting and preparing for the more harmonious time when nature should mount to her culmination in man. This primaeval chaos, with all

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its haunting discords prophetic of, and feeling after, harmony, has been finely suggested by Haydn in the prelude to his great oratorio, *The Creation*, and it issues in the glorious chorus 'The heavens are telling.' And this full and final triumph of order over chaos, of light over darkness in the physical creation, finely typifies the end towards which the great drama of moral evolution is slowly unfolding through the painful years :

With thousand shocks that come and go,
With agonies, with energies,
With overthrowings and with cries,
And undulations to and fro.

These are all simply the prophecy, pledge, and prelude of a sublimer harmony yet to be reached, of a greater glory which the heavens shall yet forthtell, when

The whole creation joins in one
To bless the sacred name
Of Him who sits upon the throne,
And to adore the Lamb.

XI

The Test of Delayed Purpose

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom, &c.—MATT. XXV. 1-13.

THIS parable is one with which we are all familiar. We have here presented to us two groups of happy-hearted girls, who, according to Eastern custom, have been invited to play and sing in a marriage procession. The parable opens with brightness and hope; it closes in gloom and despair. We shall not spend any time in discussing the transient and accidental elements which must of necessity enter into the structure of such a parable, but hasten to deal with the essential and abiding principles which are involved, for it is with these that we are concerned.

The first thing to remember is that these maidens were invited, and had accepted the invitation, for a specific purpose. That purpose stands expressed in the lighted torch which each girl bore in her hand. Their pleasing duty was to make a pathway of

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brightness for the bridegroom's feet as he approached the house of the bride.

With a fine foresight, five of them make such provision against possible delay on the part of the bridegroom that, whatever else may fail, at least the main purpose for which they have been invited shall not break down. The other five, with no thought for emergency, simply provide for immediate requirement without reckoning on contingencies, with the increased demand these would make on their supply.

Had the bridegroom come earlier in the evening, neither the wisdom of the one group nor the folly of the other would have stood revealed. By making him late, Christ teaches how purpose is tested by delay. Military experts assure us that it is not so much the fierce and hand-to-hand conflict that tests the bravery of the soldier as the waiting in the trenches for the word of command.

For the wise, the lateness of the hour, by drawing on their reserves, only threw into relief the shrewdness that had foreseen and provided against the exigencies of delay; while for the foolish the bridegroom's detention merely served to reveal the poverty of their resources and the short-sighted policy they had pursued. Their torches, which had flared up merrily in the earlier part of the evening, when they were not required, now in the black midnight, when they

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were needed most, and when the very occasion for which they had been provided had arrived, were flickering between offensive smoke and flame.

These quenched and dying torches symbolize the tragedy of a fine purpose perishing through simple want of nourishment—no proper provision having been made for sustaining it through a period of enforced delay. On the other hand, those that burned with steady and consistent flame represent a great purpose, fed and reinforced by reaching deeply down and drawing on unseen sources for clearness and strength.

Here, then, is the interpretation of the parable as we understand it. It represents two types of purpose: the one strong, steady, and sustained; the other fickle, futile, and failing of its end. But the force of the one and the futility of the other are merely brought to light, and not caused, by the bridegroom's delay. The all-sufficient, all-explaining cause lies deep in an essential distinction in personal character, which is made by Christ to display itself in the contrasted conduct of these two groups at one particular point. In everything else the wise and foolish correspond. They all go forth; they all slumber and sleep; they all rise promptly at call and prepare to trim their lamps. The single difference between them is in the manner of their

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provision for the event. This becomes the revealing point at which their wisdom or folly is made manifest.

It may seem hard that a mere error in calculation should result so tragically. But every day, in business and social life, we are met with similar examples of mere carelessness being overtaken with penalties as swift and severe as sins of intent. Men are missing chances every day simply because their purpose is below par.

The miscalculation of the foolish virgins in not making provision for a sustained and unquenchable torch was purely a mental blunder on their part; but it is intended to symbolize a moral equivalent which will serve as a criterion of judgement by which each individual must sooner or later be justified or condemned. It is in the region of a man's intent that he is always judged. This is where we break down. Here all our battles are lost or won. Nothing in character that does not come into its structure through the gates of intent will be allowed to count. Everything that is accidental will be ruled out. What we will to be and do, that we are reckoned as being and having done.

It is worthy of note that at the beginning of Christ's ministry He divided men into two classes, and into two alone. In the application of His Sermon on the Mount He pointed out that mankind were divisible

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into wise and foolish. Now that He is at the end of His ministry He has no reason to revise or reverse His decision. There are never any repealed or corrected judgements from this Man's lips. The sermons delivered at the close of His ministry only confirm and expand the principles laid down at the start. All His mingling with men during these three and a half years of public ministry, and His manifold experiences of different tempers and types, have not led Him to change or modify His views. At the end He is just where He was at the beginning. He has found no occasion to alter His mind. His classification is still twofold, with no place for any neutral or nondescript class.

No business man will quarrel with Christ's classification of these ten girls. If such a person were in need of employés he would not hesitate a moment as to which group to select. An advocate might be able to put in an appeal on sentimental grounds, and make out a capital case for the foolish girls. But he would at once reply that while sentiment may be all very well, business is business, and he has no use for men or women who have no brains, who break down at the testing-points in their history, and cannot be trusted for an emergency. The wise man is the man who takes the broadest view of a situation, who makes the amplest provision,

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who projects himself into the future and forecasts its needs. The successful man is the man who is not easily diverted from his purpose, and who, having selected some definite object of pursuit, bends to its achievement all the energies of his nature, bringing up fresh reserves of will to reinforce his drooping courage, and regarding difficulties as existing only that they may be overcome.

This is the class of man that carves out the facts of history and shapes the destinies of the world—the man with staying power ; and the same principle that rules the kingdom of heaven governs the kingdom of earth. It is not the man whose good resolves flare up after an impressive sermon, merely to flicker out like a burnt match, who will achieve anything in the realm of character. Nothing is more humiliating to a man in business than to be offered a lucrative position for which he has rendered himself unfit through the want of a steady and persistent purpose, and which he must needs allow to go by default. To such a man the very offer is as tantalizing as it is golden. Hell has been defined as ‘Opportunity in the presence of disqualification.’ Many men who complain of want of opportunity have but themselves to blame. They forget that it is both the man and the moment that make opportunity, and that neither without the other is of avail.

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It is not mere religious emotion nor good resolve that will secure a part and a lot in the kingdom of God. No mere passing enthusiasm, like the torch of the foolish virgins, kindled into a temporary flame by some fervent appeal, and then dying down in its socket, will be sufficient to light your perilous path through the deep shades of night to the goal of your desire. It must be a great and divine domination, an overmastering purpose—an all-absorbing, all-controlling purpose—that will gather up all the scattered rays of thought and endeavour and focus them to a single burning and shining flame. Now such a purpose, to be steady and unwavering under all circumstances, in all weathers, and in the face of all discouragement, must be fed by some great and sustaining motive that will bear the same relation to it that the oil did to the ancient torch. The two great motives that appeal to men in every age are love and fear. Between them these two divide the moral work of the world. They feed the flame of every endeavour towards social or moral reform.

While I do not wish to appeal to the motive of fear on this occasion, let me say that the midnight hour, the closed door, the flickering torches, the scared white faces, and the vain appeals for admittance of these unhappy girls, all combine to present a picture of such nameless dread, such helpless and

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bewildering misery that, were I an artist, I would paint it as a companion study to Holman Hunt's 'Light of the World,' and call it 'The Outer Darkness,' that it might preach to men and women everywhere to stand with torches trimmed and burning, and garments white and clean, in readiness for the coming of their Lord. I cannot paint ; but let me hang that word-picture on the walls of your memory that it may arrest the flippant and make the careless pause. In Holman Hunt's picture we have the human door with the Divine outside ; in this we have the divine door with the human outside. It is not, however, the doom of a closed door that I wish to preach, but the gospel of an open door. It is not to your fears of punishment nor your hope of reward, but to your love of the highest that I would make my appeal.

This is pre-eminently a parable for young womanhood. If the young women who read these lines will but resolve to live earnestly, grasping the torch of some great, unselfish, undying, and unifying purpose, and consecrating the charms of their womanhood to high and sacred ends, they will not only brighten the pathway for the Heavenly Bridegroom's feet, but hasten His coming by guiding earthly feet into the heavenly way. If women did but realize and rightly use their power they could turn the howling wastes of human misery into a fair and fragrant

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garden, and make the wilderness of common life to blossom as the rose.

Let me put the Highest before you. There is but One: 'He who, being the holiest among the mighty, and the mightiest among the holy, with His pierced hand lifted the empires off their hinges, turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages.' He it is who claims your highest and best. Indeed, you can become your highest and best only as you surrender to His claim. The gentlest blood of all the race flowed through His veins, and the noblest life was the life He lived for men. Listen to the plaint of the guilty Guinevere:

Ah, my God !

What might I not have made of Thy fair world
Had I but loved Thy highest creature here ?
It was my duty to have loved the highest ;
It surely was my profit had I known.
It would have been my pleasure had I seen.
We needs must love the highest when we see it.

XII

The Majesty of Meekness

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.—MATT. v. 5.

THIS beatitude must have come to Christ's auditors with the shock of a bewildering surprise. It was a teaching which turned all their preconceived notions upside down—the maxim of that and this and every age being, 'Blessed are the strenuous, the pushing, the self-assertive, for they shall inherit the earth.' The prizes of earth, whatever may be said of those of heaven, it is claimed, fall to the ambitious, the self-seeking and never-know-when-they're-beaten souls, who can hold their own against all comers, whether in the arts of peace or war.

Christ's hearers might well have pointed to the history of the past in verification of this view. How, for example, had Israel herself in the first instance become a nation? Had she not dispossessed the Canaanite at the point of the sword? Was not her whole history, from the days of the Judges down

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to the death of her shepherd-king, a perpetual call to arms? and did she not push her way to power and reach her golden age through paths of battle and of blood?

It was the same with every other world-power they had known. They had the history of nations before them as an open book. They knew that Assyria had broken the neck of Egypt, and in turn had been made by Persia to bite the dust. Persia had been humbled by Greece, and the glory of Greece had long given place to the greater glory of omnipotent and all-victorious Rome. Even while Christ was speaking, the tramp of Roman soldiery, the gleam of Roman spears, and the pressure of Roman rule was being heard and felt and seen, from India in the east to Britain in the west. How, then, in the face of such facts as these could there be any colour of truth in such a maxim as that of the text? What manner of man was this who could calmly ignore the methods which for centuries had held sway? what kind of a kingdom could He hope to found on such inverted principles, and with what chance of permanence? Yet who among us is so dull to-day as not to see that He alone held the key to universal empire? Take the tribute of a man who was no theologian, but essentially a man of affairs—a man who, on the question of empire-building has, perhaps, of all

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moderns the best right to speak. Listen to the First Napoleon, as that banished Emperor, conversing with his comrades in captivity, seeks by comparison with the great ones of earth to find his own true place in history. We quote from Liddon. ‘ Turning to Montholon he said, “Can you tell me who Jesus Christ was? Well, then, I will tell you. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I myself have founded great empires. But upon what did these creations of our genius depend? Upon force. Jesus alone founded His empire upon love, and to this very day millions would die for Him. I think I understand something of human nature, and I tell you all these were men, and I am a man. None else is like Him. Jesus Christ was more than man. I have inspired multitudes with such an enthusiastic devotion that they would have died for me; but to do this it was necessary that I should be visibly present with the electric influence of my looks, of my words, of my voice. But Christ alone has succeeded in so raising the mind of man towards the unseen that it grows insensible to the barriers of time and space, and becomes, with all its powers and faculties, an annexation to the empire of Christ.”’ This is a somewhat lengthy quotation, but it is worth reproducing; and surely the Christ who has so magnificently embodied His own Beatitude and demonstrated

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the victorious power of meekness in gaining empire over human hearts has a right to be heard when He consents to whisper the secret of His might.

What is this all-subduing weapon with which He has worked His world-wide wonders and which He fain would place in every hand? Let us at the outset clear our minds of misconception, for this word 'meek' to-day, as in the olden time, has, through misunderstanding, fallen rather into disrepute. It has come to be interpreted as the synonym for a mild and inoffensive inefficiency. Employers of men would never think of advertising for a 'meek' man. Were I to send one of the unemployed to one of the busy manufacturers of the kingdom urging that he receive a job on the ground of his meekness, you can easily imagine the smile that would overspread the employer's face, as he explained, 'Well, really, my business, you know, is a going concern, and everybody connected with it has to go too. We have no place for meek fellows in our establishment; life is too strenuous, and competition too keen.' However much he might admire the quality of meekness in his customers and clients, he has no use for it in his employés; all of which goes to show that the current conception of meekness is that of an amiable in-

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capacity, making up in sweetness what it lacks in force.

That, however, is a very safe and sensible canon of scriptural interpretation which seeks to explain Christ's words by Christ's deeds, finding out what He meant by what He did.

Adopting this principle, we find that He who claimed to be 'meek and lowly in heart' could burn at white heat of indignation, and pour out scorching invective against intolerance and wrong. The most scathing denunciations against hypocrisy and hollow-heartedness flashed sword-like from His lips; and what was it but the majesty of meekness in Gethsemane that sent the Roman cohort reeling backwards to the ground? Let us beware of spelling 'meekness' with a 'w.' It is a moral dynamic of immeasurable force. Moses was the meekest of men, but he killed an Egyptian at a blow, who was oppressing a Hebrew labourer, and subsequently won a wife for himself by his chivalrous and single-handed fight against the hoodlum shepherds of Midian who hunted the maidens from the spring. Let there be no mistake; meekness can smite when the occasion demands; and there is no more terrible phrase within the covers of Sacred Writ than 'The wrath of the Lamb.' The world has yet to learn that the highest expression of power is the control of power. This

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is the supreme test of character—not self-declaration and self-assertion, but self-restraint:

Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control,
These three alone lead life to sovereign power.

Any definition of scriptural meekness, then, to be accurate must exclude everything in the way of a weak and yielding amiability. The feebly compromising, apologetic, and 'sorry-I-spoke' temper of mind is as little consonant with this Christlike quality as is the coarse brutality which scorns and tramples under foot all the finer courtesies and amenities of life. No single English word can fully express all that is gathered up and crystallized into this New Testament term.

It is like a gem with three flashing facets, setting forth the threefold relations of man, first to God, second to self, and third to brother-man. The triple rays that flame from these several facets represent meekness on its Godward side as Faith, on its self-ward side as Hope, and on its manward side as an all-embracing Charity. On its Godward side meekness is seen to emerge as faith in its beautiful and passive form of patient and unmurmuring acquiescence in the will of the Supreme. It is the spirit of loyal and unquestioning submission to, or rather concurrence with, the mind and purpose of God. It is the temper and attitude of consenting accommodation to those

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plastic circumstances, those shaping and controlling Hands, 'that reach through nature, moulding men.'

This sweet and gracious disposition on the part of the individual will, to harmonize with that of the Universal, requires for its complete realization the knowledge of that Will. But the knowledge of the Universal Will can enter alone through the door of a humble and teachable spirit. We are speaking now of the will of God for the individual life. His general will is written large that he who runs may read ; but His specific will for the individual soul can be gathered only in lowly and adoring reverence at His feet. Listen to the Apostle Paul : 'I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.' Here you see that the proving of the divine will is linked up inseparably with the act of personal surrender, without which God's will not only cannot be done, but cannot even be ascertained. Only to him who 'wills' to do, will be shown 'what' to do.

Dropping for a moment our figure of a gem, and adopting that of a growth, let it be said that the

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fair and fragrant flower of meekness runs down and roots itself in teachableness of spirit. And see how beautifully the Scriptures link both root and flower : 'The meek will He guide in judgement, and the meek will He teach His way.' 'Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart ; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.' Here is the rest of perfect adjustment, through knowledge and acquiescence in the will of the divine ; but it comes alone to the meek and lowly in heart, who have entered themselves as pupils in the school of Christ.

This putting of oneself to school with Jesus is the translation of the abstract concept into a concrete symbol, under cover of which it appears in the classic text, 'If any man will be My disciple (that is, a scholar in My school) let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.' That is to say, the student must forgo his own will and accept that of the Master.

This demand for meekness, then, goes to the very seat and centre of all moral discord, which is self-will ; and by rightly relating that will to the will of God, restores the forfeited harmony. In every school worthy of the name the will of the pupil must be subordinated to that of the principal, for what school is that in which the master's will is not supreme ?

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It must run unimpeded and unchallenged through all pupils in all grades and classes. It must organize itself and come to expression in every member of the staff, that it may become articulate in all the duty and discipline of the institution. For every pupil in the establishment the one will of the Head must be absolute, and from it there must be no possibility of appeal. Once weaken or call into question this supremacy, and the very purpose of the school will be defeated, for its utility as an educational seat will be fatally impaired.

Now the will of God in relation to man covers and controls three great spheres, that of being and doing and suffering. The word 'meek' has come to be regarded as relating almost exclusively to the third of these spheres. That it has an active as well as a passive side we have seen very clearly from the examples of Moses and Christ. This, however, is merely its positive pole, so to speak, and it springs out of the fact that the rightly related man becomes filled with a passion for rightness in others. He is never so conscious of moral discord as when he becomes harmonized himself. A man's sense of sin, and consequent sorrow for it, are never so deep before pardon as they are after it. Indeed, the holier he becomes the more hideous does his moral past appear and the humbler he comes to be. True meekness

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thus makes inevitably for harmony both inward and outward, that is to say, both in its possessor and, through its possessor, in every one beside.

It is on the passive side of this quality of meekness that I desire us to fix our thought—this submission to the will of the Supreme. Here at once we see the necessity for knowledge of that will and its intelligent interpretation, because there are many things that people have sat down under and meekly accepted as the will of God that they ought to have stood up to and fought against with both hands. For centuries men watched the decimation of vast populations by plague and pestilence, viewing these calamities as dispensations of divine providence to which they had to submit. To-day they know that such occurrences are visitations of human dirt and delinquency which they have to resist and overcome. It is the same with many of our great social troubles. Men once said, 'These things always have been, and therefore they always will be.' A truer and saner philosophy to-day says: 'These things have been so long, that they ought to be no longer!' And so we have our reformers working for social redemption with heart and brain and hand. But when all preventable disease and social distress have been ruled out, as being unrelated to this question of meekness, there still remains an irreducible minimum of

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misery, an administration of human sorrow and loss, which represents a direct, definite, and disciplinary purpose of God for the perfection of human life.

In relation to these inevitable ills of life we shall find ample scope for the development of this quality, and for the winning of the beatitude of the text. The blessedness turns on our meekness—that is, on our acquiescence. There are four ways of meeting sorrow and loss. We may resist and resent their incidence, gathering ourselves up in protest against them. Such a spirit will exact from them no moral gain. Secondly, we may submit to them with a sullen and despairing mood, as much as to say, 'Well, what can't be cured must be endured.' This attitude will be also destitute of any reflex moral good. Thirdly, we may patiently acquiesce in the disciplinary process, recognizing it as part of God's plan for conducting life to its highest issues in symmetry and strength. This is about as far as most Christian people get; but the Apostle Paul passed to a fourth and higher stage than even this—he 'gloried' in it. 'We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation worketh patience.' Here, surely, the grace of meekness had reached its fairest and most fragrant flower. Discipline does not necessarily reduce the character to correspondence with the divine. The same furnace that turns the

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precious metal into a molten mirror, which reflects the refiner's face, only hardens into a more stolid stubbornness the worthless clay. I have seen the same dark bereavement or financial loss, under which the husband grew more spiritual and withdrawn from earth, stiffen the wife into an unbending obstinacy and a more obdurate resistance to all that was meek and lowly in heart.

How we hold ourselves to trouble will determine the moral result that will accrue. The great end that God is aiming at is perfection of character. But no character ever yet came to perfection in the fields of prosperity. Perpetual sunshine would inevitably deface its beauty and arrest its growth. Cloud and darkness are not more necessary to the golden plenty of the harvest than are discipline and distress to the perfecting of the soul. Only in the forges of trial and bereavement can the iron of our nature be wrought up into steel for the service of God and man.

Life is not as idle ore,
But iron dug from central gloom,
And heated hot with burning fears,
And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
And battered with the shocks of doom,
To shape and use.

Let us now look at that side of our subject which

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is related to our own private and personal life—that is to say, meekness in the sense of hope.

One of the root ideas of meekness is patience. But we cannot have patience without hope. Patience must have a soil into which it may strike its roots if it is to flourish in the teeth of adverse winds and under frowning skies. That soil is hope. It is hope that feeds and fertilizes patience, keeping it fresh and fragrant when every other flower in life's garden is fading to the fall; hope not merely that trouble will terminate—that were but a poor and barren result; but that, though bitter in itself, it will nevertheless yield a sweet and abiding joy. It is a hope, not merely that the winter will pass, but that the coming spring will be the richer by reason of the gloom through whose dark desolation the life has been led. This is the confidence that hope begets, that we shall not emerge from trouble precisely as we entered, but that we shall have gained on the moral what we may have lost on the material side.

What wonder, then, that Christ should say, 'Blessed are the meek,' when they thus hold the secret of that divine alchemy which turns all it touches into gold? Subtract hope from life, and forthwith you reduce its power to attempt or achieve or endure. It must draw upon the future for its inspirations to be and to do and to suffer. All the best work of the

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world in science, art, literature, music, as well as in social and moral reform, has been wrought under the spell of hope. The more spacious and far-reaching the hope, the more patient and persistent the endeavour.

Hope lies at the back of all heroism, whether active or passive. Enlarge the sphere of hope, extend its range, give it the everlasting durations on which to draw for supplies, and straightway you intensify the sense of duty and heighten to infinity the greatness and grandeur of life. 'No man,' says Canon Liddon, 'who has not a clear belief in the doctrine of a future life can have permanently a strong sense of duty.' This witness is true, and universal experience endorses it. Adopt the to-morrow-we-die creed of the materialist, and you will speedily see how it will react with disaster and disintegration on the moral and social life of man.

No individual or nation ever yet came to anything without a firm, bright hope in a life beyond the grave. Any relaxation of this hope leads inevitably, whether in personal or national life, to the loosening of all moral ties and the throwing off of all restraint, as well as to a reduction of man's power to endure.

Go and stand by the open grave and try the effect of the materialistic creed on those who have followed all that was mortal of their loved one to its quiet resting-place. Tell them that he is no more, that

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immortality is only a priest's fiction, a poet's fancy, or a painter's dream ; and on the lowest ground of mere utility you have done a disastrous thing, because you have by so much reduced the working power of life.

A creed that cannot take the hand of the widowed mother or the fatherless child and whisper of the 'Better Land' where sorrow and death are done away—that cannot stand by the bed of pain and assure the sufferer that his days of weakness and nights of agony are the necessary parts of a plan for the perfecting of the soul, and for which the future holds endless compensations in its hands—a creed that cannot do this is, on merely utilitarian grounds, condemned as a worthless and discredited thing.

It is just here that the gospel of Christ meets us with its message of immortal hope. 'We are begotten again,' says Peter, 'unto a living hope.' Peter had known what it was to have a dead hope in his bosom and a dead Christ in the grave. And then he had known the rapture of hope's revival with the resurrection of his Lord ; and in the strength of that new-born hope he had been prepared to, and did indeed, for the sake of his Master, go to prison and to death ! A dead hope lies heavy as lead and cold as frost upon the heart ; but a living hope is like a solid core of heat within the breast, melting even

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the cold conclusions of the brain, till all that is sanest in thought is made to mingle with all that is deepest in feeling, and to outflow in molten streams of pure and purifying power.

The gospel of Jesus is the gospel of hope, and therein lies the dynamic of patience. Hope alone can feed the fires of endurance. Shut a man up in a mean and impoverished present, give him no future on which to draw for his inspirations, and you forthwith cut the sinews of effort, you 'ground' all the electric currents of lofty and sustained endeavour. The blessedness of the meek, then, lies in the spring of their immortal hope, in their spacious outlook, and the ample future on which they operate. The patience of meekness has its active as well as its passive side, because to wait may often mean to be busily and incessantly employed, and not to sit with listless mind and folded arms. Hope, because it is the sustaining, becomes really the achieving, power of life. It comes in when effort would flag, when the will would capitulate, when thought would surrender to perplexity, when courage would falter and resolution would fail; and it rallies all the forces to new and sustained attempt. It is hope that puts the keys of the future in our hands. It gives poise, repose, and leisureliness to life, for 'he that believeth shall not make haste.' With the assurance of a hope

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that has its home in the eternities, and is certain of an endless field for the fulfilment of its promise and the unfolding of life's powers, there is no need to be distressed. This principle lays its calming, cooling hand upon our fevered spirits. It reduces the inflammation of life, soothing its petulance and passion, and steadyng its pace, by giving it an eternal outlook on which to gaze.

This future consists not merely of vast distances and measureless durations, vacant of being and void of blessedness, but is filled and flooded with a personal Presence, the source and fount of all beatitude. It is a future that will gather up and harmonize all the discords of the present in a full and final symphony that men have been for ever feeling after if haply they might find. May our spirits be keyed to the calm of those majestic movements that neither haste nor rest by the hope which, while it wings its flight forward, yet for ever sends its song backward to the heart that waits and wearies, that struggles and strains, bidding it be of good cheer, for its warfare will soon be accomplished and crowned with abundance of peace.

Having thus dealt with meekness in two of its relations, first to God and secondly to our own souls, it now remains to be seen how it issues in regard to our fellow men.

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One of the facets of this lustrous gem flashes with the warm and tender light of love, and in that particular aspect of love in which 'it suffers long and is kind.' In I Cor. xiii. the Apostle Paul shows how love is the basal principle from which all the virtues derive their origin and support. It is the only ground that can sustain them. Plant them anywhere else, and even if they endure for a season it is only as odourless and colourless blooms. To bear with the unkind and unthankful we must love them. But here a question arises which has tormented many minds: How can we love to order, especially the unlovely and unlovable?

As to loving everybody, this seems not only impossible, but undesirable. Love, in the very nature of things, must be spontaneous; it cannot be worked up. Of all things in the world it must be free from dissimulation. How, then, can we pretend to love folk towards whom we are absolutely apathetic, and concerning whom it would not give us a moment's concern if we never saw them again, whether in this life or in that which is to come? But these are not the worst. There are others towards whom we are positively antipathetic. Their words and ways are a perpetual offence to us. Their very presence awakens a feeling of resentment; they 'get on our nerves'; we have absolutely nothing in common with them in the way

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of taste or temperament. As for loving them—well, it is simply out of the question ; we cannot even tolerate them. Now, without asking ourselves the disquieting question as to how much of all this is due to personal pride and aloofness of spirit, and as to whether a closer walk with God would not lead to a closer walk with man, let us remind ourselves that the love required of us toward our brother men is not that of passion or sentiment. It is love as a principle of active service in their behalf. The command, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,' gives us not merely the measure, but also the quality of the love required. How does a man love himself? Certainly not with hand-clasps and hugs round the neck. He does not stand before a mirror and feast his eyes on his own features and swear undying affection to himself in a thousand tender vows. No ; his love for himself is a concern for his own welfare ; it is a care for his interests ; it expresses itself in provision for his wants and a prudent self-regard. And it is through this love of self that we are to construe the scriptural requirement of love of our neighbour. It is not amorous, but regardful, sympathetic, solicitous, and anxious to serve. Thou shalt love, as a principle of brotherly interest and beneficent ministry.

There are two main words for 'love' in the New

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Testament, and the one with which we are now dealing, and of which 'meekness' is the expression, is related to the idea of worship. Indeed, the word for 'reverence' and the word for 'love' both run down into a common root, and so also do the things they stand for. This is no place for a discussion in philology; but it is deeply significant and richly suggestive that 'love' and 'reverence' are thus united at their base, and that they both meet and find their unity in this word 'meekness' which we are seeking to unfold.

The highest and holiest love is ever based in the deepest reverence. We cannot truly love that which we do not revere. There is an unmistakable element of reverence in meekness, which, when it turns Godward, induces the sense of awed submission to an overmastering purpose which is felt to be as wise as it is powerful and as beneficent as it is wise, while in its manward outlook it sees and reveres the possible angel even in the morally dilapidated and defiled.

Here, then, alone is the permanent basis from which to operate our systems of uplift and reform—reverence for the ideal in man! We must be possessed with the belief, which nothing can shake, that every child of man, however deeply sunk in sin and shame, is a possible child of God.

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To pierce through the accidental and discover the essential, to find the divine beneath the ruins of the human, this is love's prerogative and pride. Seek to serve and to save some one, and it will astonish you how soon you will begin to love. Once you interest yourself in a fellow creature and commence to seek to work for his good, however unlovely his character, you begin to be fascinated by your work. You find yourself watching for every hopeful sign, sheltering every tiniest and tenderest blade of good, and waiting with wondrous patience for the coming harvest of your prayer and toil. This reverence for man as man sees the slumbering divinity in natures close akin to brutes, and ever strives to rouse it into consciousness and raise it to its regal place and power—this is meekness on its positive and working side; so that we have now beheld this grace in its threefold beauty and power, as Faith towards God, as Hope for ourselves, and as Love towards our brother man. Nor are we left to the contemplation of it in its merely abstract beauty; for all the scattered rays of this triple splendour are gathered up and focused in the life and character and death of our incarnate Lord.

XIII

The Enthronement of Meekness

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.—MATT. v. 5.

THROUGH the majesty of meekness has Christ come to His throne. He emptied Himself, says the apostle, and therefore God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. This contemplation of the 'Holiest among the mighty and the Mightiest among the holy' thus making Himself of no reputation that He might bridge the moral distance which sin had made between us and God, slays our pride, burns up our selfishness, and humbles us into penitence and tears.

It now becomes necessary to show the relation between meekness and that inheritance of the earth which is its promised reward. We have seen how faith and hope and love are gathered up and crystallized into a rare and radiant gem, so that its happy possessor is thereby enabled to fulfil the threefold relation in which all men stand to God and self and brother man.

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Now, faith, hope, and love are the abiding things, so that the personalities in whom they converge and cohere are the personalities that will survive 'when all that seems shall suffer shock.' These qualities constitute the elements of permanent character, and meekness is the all-embracing term that gathers them to a focal point.

In meekness we find the meeting-place of both right and might—the right and might of moral kingship. The coronation of meekness is the declared supremacy of goodness—the enthronement of moral force.

Graduates in meekness, through surrender of the will and affections to the Supreme, realize their birthright. They are 'begotten again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to the inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.' This inheritance is an acquired moral right through the laws and lines of spiritual descent. The heirs are the sons and daughters of the Highest—the children of the King. They are princes and princesses of the blood, whose right it is to rule.

The word 'inherit' carries the double sense of rulership and possession. This element of rulership marks a fine distinction between moral and merely material possession. Ownership does not always and

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necessarily mean mastership. A man may come into the inheritance of vast possessions, but instead of his ruling them they may rule him. How often have we seen the acquisition of wealth result in the narrowing of a man's horizons! This is ever the peril, lest the making of money should result in the unmaking of men, contracting the sympathies, warping the judgement, deflecting the conscience, and hardening the heart.

When a man's ruling love is fixed upon material things, instead of being their master he becomes their slave. He is under the delusion that he wields a sceptre; but let him only attempt to translate some generous impulse into action, and lo! the lying symbol of his mastership is smitten from his hand and bent into a yoke for his neck. But the inheritance of the meek is moral, and therefore permanent, for the moral is the only thing that endures. This is the loud sermon that the past is for ever preaching.

As we turn the leaves of history, this lesson everywhere confronts us in letters of blood and fire. The heart grows sick at the changing fortunes which pursue each other through the chapters of the past with all the swiftness of a bioscopic show. History merely resolves itself into a great march past of the nations. Israel, Egypt, Assyria, Persia,

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Greece, Carthage, Rome, Venice, each has had its opportunity, and, failing under the moral test, has had to go.

There are no exceptions to this rule. God is no respecter of nations any more than of persons. He has no favourites. Kingdoms flourish or decay according to their loyalty to the best they know. This is the truth that leaps from every page of the past to grip the heart and conscience with an iron strength. Oh for grace to learn the lesson that for nations, as for individuals, it is only the pure that will endure, and that character is the only thing that counts.

The survival of the meek as the fittest, because the morally best, presented a paradox to Christ's hearers which the overshadowing power of the Roman rule served only to accentuate. Certainly it was anything but meekness that was then wearing the purple, and occupying the thrones and chairs of civil power. The Roman was proud, contemptuous, overbearing. For him to see was to seize, till his colonies were planted on every coast, from India in the east to Britain in the west. Had Christ said, 'Blessed are the strenuous, the pushful, the ambitious, the insolent and unscrupulous,' His hearers would have been ready to endorse His teaching; for Roman soldiers marched their streets, Roman laws restricted

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them, Roman taxes crushed them, and everywhere they were confronted with the symbols of Roman power. It never occurred to them to question the permanence of this system. It had all the semblance of endurance. Men might come and men might go; but the Roman had come to stay. And yet, had Christ but lifted the veil of the future ever so little, He could have shown them how even then, corrupt in mind and diseased at heart, the mighty empire of the Caesars was already tottering to its fall. It is difficult, when you see highly organized and solidly set institutions before you, to imagine that they are merely the shifting pageants of a passing show. Neither is it easy, when faced with vast armies, finely disciplined and equipped with instruments of war, to escape the impression of irresistible and permanent power.

But Christ pierced through all this seeming solidity, and saw the limits of merely physical force. Though everything about Him seemed to fling back a contradiction to His words, He declared meekness to be the winning force in history and the only power that held the promise of the future in its hands. Think for a moment of all the strenuous forces of the world of men, the marshalling of contending armies, the thunder of onset by sea and land, the contests in the world of business, the

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fierce commercial competitions, the eager and urgent pushing for place and power, the mighty industrial forces that are yoked up to the world's work—forces which are driving the wheels of progress and exchanging the commodities of all lands to meet the multiplied needs of the race. These and all other driving forces you can name are ultimately resolvable into some sort of love, either noble or base, either divine or demoniac.

We have, therefore, but to ask what quality of love is predominant in any force which is operating in order to forecast the duration of the work by which it is expressed. Only that which is unselfish will be permanent. Once for all let it be said that the supreme force of the world is moral. To this force every other shall bow the knee. It shall yet be universally admitted as paramount—it shall yet come to its kingdom and demonstrate its power. Through the moral door of meekness alone can men come into inheritance of the earth—that is, into legitimate right to hold and rule. Any other tenure, however seemingly lasting, is simply temporary and on sufferance, or to serve some moral end—for even the frenzy of greed and the passion of ambition can be made to serve far-reaching and ethical aims. But while men of no moral character may acquire a temporary loan of the earth, it is nevertheless

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the sure and certain inheritance of the meek, who shall yet come to their own.

And now look for a moment at the conception of rulership which the text involves. The rule of the earth was promised to man at the outset of his career. It is his pledged inheritance, and merely withheld until he morally comes of age. Listen as the Almighty gathers up the reins of authority and rule to place in His creatures' hands : ' Replenish the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.' But we see not yet man in full dominion, because the key to such rulership is in the temper of our text. Man must qualify for rulership without by conquest within. He must first reign king of himself before the sceptre of control can be trusted to his hands. Have you ever thought why it is that so many scientific discoveries have been reserved until so late in the history of the world ? May not the rudimentary moral stage of the race suggest the reason ? It is not safe to trust vast physical forces in the hands of men who are not controlled by moral considerations. Moral and mental development must keep pace, or progress will mean disaster. It is a well-known law in mechanics that if you heighten the speed of your engine you must pro-

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portionately increase your power of control. If you are taking a trip on a steam-roller, you do not require to see an obstacle or a turn in the road a hundred yards before you come to it, nor to have gear that will act in the fraction of a second. But if you are travelling in a high-speed motor, you will require a control that will be instantaneous in its action, and to which your machine will immediately respond. And so, if you increase a people's mental pace, you must in the same ratio heighten their power of moral control, or speed will be only speed to disaster and doom. Thus it is that a people's meekness will always become the truest index of their might. Apply this test to the civilizations that have passed, and in every case it will be seen that it was the absence of the moral element that turned their greatness into a self-destroying power.

The earth has many secrets yet to unfold; undreamt-of possibilities dwell in the air we breathe, the water we drink, the light we see, and even in the solid ground beneath our feet and the ocean that girdles it round. But these forces wait the higher moral evolution of the race for their unveiling, for it must not be that the sceptre pass into any but meek and beneficent hands.

It follows, therefore, that any inheritance of the

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earth promised in this beatitude will have to be construed through the moral qualities which meekness is seen to involve. That is to say, the promised reward must correspond ethically with the character it is designed to compensate and crown. Our sense of moral fitness demands that there shall be some sort of relevancy between the reward bestowed and the character that is sought to be blest. This is a principle universally recognized and observed. Think of the incongruity of a missionary to the South Sea Islanders addressing a group of savages thus: 'We bring you the gospel of Jesus Christ, which teaches love and forgiveness and the abandonment of all your cruel and horrible practices. If you will accept its teaching, and turn your back upon all your savage customs, you shall be rewarded at the end of the year with—a cannibal feast.' Yet this would be in no way worse than the reward of this beatitude if interpreted in literal terms. It would make the Saviour say: 'Blessed are the unworldly—those who have renounced the material in favour of the moral, the kingdom of earth for the kingdom of heaven—for they shall inherit so much earth!' That is, the thing they have been weaned from, the thing that they have been taught to regard only as a means to larger and sublimer ends, is to turn out, after all, to be itself the end, the *summum bonum*,

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the highest good! Could anything be greater in the way of incongruity than this?

We are compelled, therefore, on the grounds of moral consistency to interpret the word 'earth' in our text as something other and higher than the material world beneath our feet. We are justified in giving it the widest possible signification, as including all the laws and forces of the material order, together with the inner mental and moral meanings they connote. The right to such inheritance springs out of heirship, and heirship is based on relationship. 'If children, then heirs.' We come into this possession, then, not by struggle and strife, nor at the point of the sword, nor by self-assertiveness; but by self-surrender. By aiming at the first and highest thing, which is relationship, the second, which is heirship, is secured. This beatitude is really the germ-plasm from which is subsequently developed the beautiful teaching of Jesus in this self-same sermon, and which flowers into that exquisite counsel of trust, 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.' 'Added,' that is to say they will come, not in a haphazard or inconsequential way, but by inheritance, and following in natural and logical sequence from the fulfilled relations that have been set up and sustained.

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To inherit the earth, then, is to inherit all that the earth symbolizes and stands for. Nature, with all her wondrous laws, her marvellous adaptations, her gracious utilities, and her innumerable types of animal and vegetable life, is simply organized mind, and all our science is but the human effort to translate nature back again into terms of thought—to find, that is to say, the mental equivalents of her material processes. But Nature is not merely the expression of mind, but of heart. She is not only mental, but moral; and the mental is everywhere subordinate to the moral, and therefore must be construed through it to be rightly understood.

It is upon this richer and larger inheritance that the children of God are to enter, and not on the mere possession of material earth; and they are to enter upon it—partly, at least—here and now. The word 'inherit' has a forward look, it is true; but just as the heir to material possessions is permitted during his minority to draw upon his future inheritance for his present needs, so an earnest of the promised inheritance comes even here and now to those who have graduated in the school of meekness, and have thus acquired the moral qualities which render them eligible to realize in part their birth-right as the sons of God. This moral qualification has a much wider range and significance than many

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would suppose, and stands as a condition even to mental clearness and insight. Illingworth has shown conclusively that the two men who are most associated in the English mind with the scientific method—Francis Bacon and John Stuart Mill—are equally emphatic in tracing intellectual fallacies to moral causes. Emerson endorses the same view when he tells us that 'all the springs of genius take their rise in the mountains of rectitude.'

The men who have been most successful in pushing behind the veil of material things—

Who searched through all they felt or saw
The springs of life, the depths of awe,
And reached the law within the law—

have been deeply reverential men. We have already seen that there is a considerable element of reverence in meekness, the sense of awed submission to an overmastering purpose and power. Thus it comes to pass that the men who get the most out of the earth here and now—the men to whom Nature most readily yields up her secret—are the men who are meek and lowly in heart. For the careless and flippant she has no disclosures. She does not admit them to her sanctities nor unfold to them her thought. The secret of Nature, like the secret of Nature's Lord, is with them that reverence her, and to them alone does she unveil. It is the child-

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spirit of meekness, that teachableness of disposition, that will secure our being led

 Into regions yet untrod,
 To read what is still unread
 In the manuscripts of God.

The moral qualities necessary to the best work, even in the realm of physical research, have long since been recognized, even by men who have stood aloof from the churches, and made no pretence to orthodoxy of faith. Think of the patience, the persistence, the courage, the loyalty to facts, the absolute candour and self-restraint, the freedom from passion and prejudice, and the score of other qualities which are essential to accurate observation and successful experiment in the way of scientific research.

Only he who comes in meek and lowly mood and puts himself to school at Nature's feet will hear her speak. But he will. Her messages will tremble to him on the midnight starbeam, and whisper in the evening breeze. The waving forest will be vocal with their music, and the ocean will break the secret in myriad accents to the hearing ear and the understanding heart. Hence it is that through meekness man comes into the inheritance of Nature's inner thought and purpose, which is the thought and purpose of God. Physical science, rightly interpreted, is the 'thinking of God's thoughts after Him.' It

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is the unravelling of the divine purpose, the disclosing of His method, the rendering back of matter and its forces into terms of mind and will.

But matter is never constant; it is in perpetual flux. It is mind alone that abides. Behind and beneath all phenomena pulses and beats and burns the changeless will of God; and the man who can pierce through the passing show of things, who can push behind and beneath mere semblances, and lay hold of the essential and underlying soul of them, is alone the true possessor of the earth, and not the man who merely holds its acreage in hand. The only abiding inheritance is that which passes through moral and mental appropriation into the structure of character. Of this nothing can rob us. Our stored mental impressions, our intellectual and moral acquisitions, no moth or rust can corrupt, no thief break through and steal. Into this inheritance we come through the gateway of meekness, and the moral discipline that this involves supplies us with the subjective factor of value upon which the worth of everything objective depends. It is what we bring to a thing in the way of mental and moral appreciation that imparts to it its value. Ballarat and Bendigo were just as rich in gold, and Broken Hill in silver, and Moonta in copper before the white man put his foot in Australia; but they were of

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no value to the aborigines, for the simple reason that they had no appreciation of their worth. It is the same with regard to mental values.

All the laws and forces of the material world are spread out before the mind of the savage as they are before that of the scientist, but with what difference of result! To the one they are nothing but a series of unrelated phenomena, while to the other they are the ordered processes of a system whose causes can be accurately traced, and whose issues can be definitely forecast. The difference does not lie in the system, but in the contemplating and interpreting mind.

All worth thus depends on the plus quantity of mind that is brought to the matter in hand. Subtract brains from any enterprise, and immediately values depreciate. The richer the mind the richer the matter becomes with which it deals. Here, for example, are heaps of tailings from a copper mine, which for years have been cast as rubbish to the void; so much so, indeed, that the proprietors have paid to have it carted away. But a German chemist comes along and mixes his brains with the tailings, and straightway every shovelful is of worth. Give a savage ink, paper, and a pen, and he will probably drink the ink, hang the pot round his neck as an ornament, and add the paper and pen to the pantheon

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of his household gods. Give similar materials to Shakespeare, to Milton, to Bunyan, and behold a moving tragedy, a mighty epic, or an immortal dream!

Look at it in another way. Have you ever thought how meagre and inexpensive are the materials which go to make a great picture? Just a few oils, a bit of canvas, and a brush or two—the whole of which can be purchased for a few shillings at the most. But when these are handled by a great artist, who pours his soul into his work, you get a production like that, say, of Sir Joshua Reynolds, for which Mr. Alfred Beit paid willingly £22,000. It is, then, this inner and plus quantity which everywhere creates value.

That which makes the world a better place to-day for you and me to live in than it was in the grey beginning of years, is not that man has added a single ounce to its gold or silver, its copper or coal. He has not created one of the forces which sweep majestically around him and bend their necks to his yoke. They were all here before he came, and were waiting for his appropriating and utilizing brain. But he has brought to them that without which their scientific, artistic, or industrial value would be nil, namely, the cultured brain, the seeing eye, and the skilful hand. The obedience which these acquirements have necessitated on his part, the self-denial,

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the finely-disciplined accuracy, the trained power of observation, and the delicacy of adjustment in conducting experiments, are all expressive of moral qualities, without which no man can intellectually enter the kingdom of earth. The man who has qualified for this beatitude and truly inherits the earth is he who has penetrated to the very heart of Nature, to whom she whispers her secrets, and whom her forces stand ready to obey. It is not the man, then, who merely annexes territory that has earned this blessedness, any more than the man who merely owns a library is heir to all the knowledge it contains. He, and he alone, is the true possessor who transfers the contents of his books to his brain, and stores his mind with the best thoughts of the world's best thinkers. You may burn that man's library, but you can never disinherit him of his mental stores. They are a permanent possession, and will survive when all that is merely material will have suffered ruin and decay. Thus, when we come to see that through meekness alone we enter into the possession of that which endures, we also see with how fine an understanding the teaching of the great apostle harmonizes with that of his great Master, Christ, as he declares, 'And now abideth faith, hope, love ; but the greatest of these is love.'

XIV

The Disqualifications of Disloyalty

If they believe not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead.—LUKE xvi. 31.

THE parable from which our text is selected is one of the parables of doom. It is a striking fact that in each case in which Christ lifts the veil of the future, He makes the soul's destiny to turn, not on some wrong thing done, but on some right thing left undone. In every case the charge brought against the condemned is purely negative. It is the failure to come up to some required standard of conduct rather than the positive violation of any given command. Take, for example, the man without the wedding garment. There was nothing in his behaviour to which exception could be taken. He did not abuse the host, nor annoy the guests. Even when challenged with his default he did not attempt any justification, nor set forth any extenuating plea. He simply failed to comply with a conventional condition, and on the mere negative charge of non-

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conformity to an established custom he was ejected from the marriage feast. Then again in the Parable of the Barren Fig-tree. There was nothing noxious in the tree. It shed no baleful influence around it. It was not the production of any poisonous fruit that evoked the threat of extirpation. No one was any the worse for its existence. But no one was any the better, and this was the trouble. It was simply that it failed to produce its expected crop, so it had to go. Under cover of this symbol of unfulfilled expectation the inefficiency of the Jewish Church was set forth, and its doom foretold. It was a condemnation on purely negative grounds.

Again, in the Parable of the Ten Virgins there was nothing in the character of the five excluded girls to which exception could be taken. They were happy-hearted maidens, full of the anticipation of the wedding festival. There is no suggestion of any impropriety in their conduct. There was nothing unmaidenly in their behaviour. No faintest breath of suspicion dims their fair fame. There is no shadow of a hint that any minutest positive element of disqualification came between them and the marriage feast. Their exclusion proceeds entirely on negative grounds. Not what they did, but what they did not, barred them from the brightness of the bridal hall. Again, in the Parable of the Ten Talents, the charge

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brought against the accused is not that he had squandered his talent or put it to unlawful uses. He had not wasted it in riotous living. He did not dissipate or gamble it away. On the contrary, he was so scrupulously careful, so timorously apprehensive of doing something wrong with it that he did nothing at all. This was his sin ; not what he did, but what he failed to do. So that here again, as heretofore, retribution is seen following hard upon the heels of mere default. And so, in harmony with this selfsame principle, Christ spoke the parable which is before us to-day. No charge of positive sin is brought against this rich man. There is no need to suppose him any other than a highly moral and altogether estimable citizen. Christ does not suggest for a moment that his money was obtained by any but honest means, or that he spent it in illicit ways. His sin lay in the measureless self-content with which he wrapped himself about while Lazarus lay untended at his gate. It was the selfishness that lapped itself in comfort and steeped the senses in luxurious ease, to the utter disregard of the poverty which crouched at his very door, that damned the rich man's soul to hell. It was the hell—and there is no hell like it—of the man who, because he would not when he could, found he could not when he would. Because he did not bridge the social gulf

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between himself and Lazarus in this life the moral gulf between them could not be bridged in the next.

In order to a right understanding of the parable, it requires to be placed in relation to what had occurred in the previous chapter. Christ has been teaching that life cannot be lived on two different moral planes at one and the same moment of time. He illustrates it by showing the impossibility of one servant being under the command of two rival masters, and points out the corresponding impossibility of a divided service between Mammon and God. It is interesting to notice how this idea of service is thus quietly assumed by Christ. I think we shall readily admit that this is hardly the sense in which a rich man is accustomed to regard himself in relation to his wealth. That is to say, if he were asked to define his relation to his possessions, he would never dream of questioning his proprietorship or of regarding them as anything else than the servants of his will. But with a profounder insight and a truer regard for facts, Christ points out that when a man's ruling love is set on material possessions he no longer rules, but serves. Instead of controlling his wealth, his wealth controls him. When this happens he is no longer master, but slave. Not that he is conscious of having abdicated—and this is the tragedy of the thing. He is the victim of illusion. He dreams that he wields his wealth as

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a sceptre, but he wakes to find it smitten from his hand and bent into a yoke for his neck. Think of what this bondage means. It means the drying up of all a man's sympathies, the perversion of all his noblest instincts, and the turning of them downwards to the dust. The narrowing lust of gold coarsens the mind, materializes the soul, hardens the heart, dethrones the manhood, till faith and hope and love are consumed in the fires of vulgar selfism, and the very faculty for good becomes destroyed.

The Saviour's statement of this materializing principle roused the derision of the Pharisees—'who,' explains the evangelist, 'were lovers of money'—so that they openly scoffed at the teaching of Christ. All unconsciously they were thus supplying confirmation of His judgement, and providing proof of their own moral deterioration. These men represented the ecclesiastical order, the conventional piety of the day. It was the piety, however, which, though it made long prayers in the temple, had no pity for the poverty and pain that were laid at its doors. The rich man in the parable represents the easy-going indifferentism that looks out from a safe distance on the misery and want that heave and moan throughout the world, while Lazarus stands for the neglected problem of human poverty, that yet will cleave an impassable gulf between the selfish

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rich and all the brightness and beauty of the Father's house.

Is it not too true that many of us are perfectly content that these evils should continue to exist so long as they do not obtrude themselves upon our notice? We mistake our sense of decorum for moral sensitiveness, and imagine that we have ably served the cause of virtue when, forsooth, we have merely gilt-edged a vice. 'The optimist,' says a modern cynic, 'is a man who does not care what happens as long as it does not happen to him,' and this too accurately describes the temper of even many professing Christians, who by their self-centred conduct are causing the enemies of the Gross to blaspheme.

Let us have done with the sickly sentimentalism that sheds copious tears over the imaginary woes of fiction, but never by any chance sheds a shilling to alleviate the real woes of fact. The great world is hungry not merely for bread—though, God knows, it is short enough of that—but for sympathy, for the consciousness of human brotherhood and the clasp of friendly hands.

'Oh,' says some man, 'if I had plenty of money, like some people I know, then I would give.'

Excuse me, you would do nothing of the sort. If you do not share what you have with those who have not; if you are too mean to lighten some one

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else's burden and brighten some one else's path when you are earning £2 a week, you would not do it if you earned a hundred. The multiplication of your income by a million would only make you a million times more mean. It is only the man who is generous when he has a little that is philanthropic when he has much—and not always he. For very often we find that those who were open-hearted and open-handed when they had but a competence have become under the influence of affluence unspeakably and almost unaccountably close-fisted and near.

The mean man is unworthy to enter the kingdom of God. The Ingersolls, the Voltaires, the Bradlaughs of society, whose hearts are kindly and whose hands are open to the cry of need, will pass in before the orthodox skinflint who turns a deaf ear to the cry of misery, and denies the hungry bread. Would that it might be possible to say of us as was said of Ingersoll on the day they bore him to his quiet resting-place: 'Were every one for whom he did a kindly deed to lay a single bloom upon his grave, then he would sleep to-night beneath a wilderness of flowers.'

Christ judges His hearers by their own standards, and shows them in His parable that loyalty to Moses and the prophets would have delivered them

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from the avaricious greed which, unless arrested, would yet smite them through and through with bitter memories and scorch like burning flame.

In morals, as in physics, there is ever a tendency to equilibrium. The heated air from the flame of the candle ascends, and the surrounding cold air rushes in to restore the balance. The keel of the ship cleaves a furrow through the deep, but the level is speedily restored. The alkali and the acid create a tumult in the tumbler which is presently succeeded by a dead calm. Your hand grasps a cold iron rod, but presently the warmth of your hand and the coldness of the iron come to a mean temperature. Now, the same law is at work adjusting the balance between belief and practice, and seeking to make creed and conduct coincide. It is a law that abhors any tilt in the scale-beam, and is for ever correcting preponderance. When it cannot level conduct up to creed it levels creed down to conduct. This is precisely what had happened in the case of those against whom Christ pointed the moral of the text. The parable, let it be remembered, is not individual, but generic—the rich man types a class, and the text is the New Testament statement of a universal law. We have not to do with the rich man to-day, but with his five brothers. He desires for them a supplementary revelation while they are meanwhile

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treating with contempt what had been already revealed. 'They have Moses and the prophets,' says Abraham to the rich man—that is to say, they possessed the highest ethical standard which, until the coming of Christ, the world had yet received. But their treatment of it, their disloyalty to what they already knew, fatally disqualified them from knowing more. The principle of administration here, as everywhere, is expressed in the familiar formula, 'To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not shall be taken away that which he hath.'

The rich man's prayer was practically a request to invert this principle, and to give his brothers a premium for disloyalty to the light they had by granting them more. At first sight it seems a harmless enough request; but, upon investigation, it reveals the perverted moral sense of the petitioner, for the answer to this prayer would have meant the subversion of a basal and universal law—a law that governs inexorably and indiscriminately all the kingdoms of life. It is the law which determines that faculty, whether physical or moral, shall be strengthened and developed by use, but marred and weakened, and finally confiscated, by disuse. That the refusal was anything but arbitrary is clear from the text. It is a refusal based upon the utter futility

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of bestowing the favour desired. 'If they believe not Moses and the prophets,' says Abraham, 'neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.' This belief of Moses and the prophets is not a question of mental assent and appreciation, but of moral consent and assimilation. It is to the moral instincts that Moses and the prophets make their appeal; and the teaching of the text is that the instincts that had not responded to the message of these were thereby rendered incapable of receiving and responding to the more subtle manifestation that was sought on their behalf. Though Moses and the prophets are thus bracketed by Christ in this parable, they are not therefore to be understood as being on the same teaching plane. Moses and the prophets represent a graduated and progressive system of moral education. Thus the man who had been truest to the message of Moses was thereby best fitted to catch the spiritual thought of the prophet. The man who submitted to the teaching of the prophet was thus prepared for that of the Christ, and the man who surrendered himself to the teaching of Christ was graduated for the culture of the Holy Spirit. Men are thus prepared for the reception of more advanced truth through their loyalty to the elementary. It is a question of moral culture. The kindergarten method of appeal to the eye, the ear,

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and the touch precedes and prepares the way for the more abstract methods of a later stage. In any system of education rejection of the elementary would fatally bar the way to further advance. For example, if a man wishes to enter the kingdom of a new language he must come in through the gate of the alphabet. There is no other way. It does not in the least matter how great the man may be, he must humble himself and become as a little child, or he cannot enter in. Now, what the alphabet is to the history and poetry and philosophy of a great language, that Moses and the prophets are to the higher teachings of Jesus Christ.

There is, then, but one way to the higher reaches and ranges of truth, and that is through acceptance of the elementary. It is only through loyalty to the rudiments that the fair tree of knowledge will consent to unfold itself and grow from more to more. Imagine, if you can, a man who has scorned the initial and preparatory steps in a Greek course, who refuses to learn declensions and conjugations, and yet presents himself before a classical professor and requests to be instructed in the higher methods of Greek composition. The reply of the professor will be obvious: 'If you believe not the teachers of the elements, then how can you receive my words?'

Or look at it in this way. Suppose that Plato or

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Socrates were to revisit this earth for the purpose of discoursing on Greek philosophy, with whom would they be best able to communicate? Would not their lips be sealed to all but those who had not only acquired knowledge of the Greek tongue, but had penetrated to the inner meaning of Greek thought? Or again, let some new and startling discovery be made in the realm of medicine that promises to effect a revolution in the treatment of a certain disease. Whom will the discoverer select as the persons to whom his discovery shall be made known? Will he not choose professional medical men, and preferably specialists, before whom to conduct his experiments and demonstrate the claims of his specific, rather than laymen who, however interested, are precluded through want of training from rightly assessing its worth? Here, for example, is an extract from the daily press with regard to Professor Behring's alleged consumption cure:

'A New York millionaire has offered £10,000 to Dr. Behring if he will immediately make his treatment known, providing that a competent committee pronounces it successful; but the offer has been declined. Dr. Behring says he can never accept such aid from private persons, and no benefit would accrue from the publication desired.' He added: 'It is a mistake to imagine that I have kept my new dis-

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covery secret. This is not so. But I have chosen, and will continue to choose, the persons to whom I have made that communication. My only desire is to have such collaborators as I know will advance the matter. It is only by leaving such delicate investigations in the hands of duly qualified men of science that progress can be made.'

This testimony finely illustrates and endorses the principle for which we are contending in divine revelation. It would have been vain to send Lazarus to the five brethren of the rich man, seeing they were presumably living the same selfish life that he himself had led. When a faculty has been extirpated by perversion or disuse, how is an appeal to that faculty to be successfully made? It is of no use to flash danger signals on the track of a blind man; you must appeal to some other sense. And men who are insensible to Moses and the prophets are certainly not to be convinced by more subtle means. If they are to be persuaded at all, then it will be by commencing further back and submitting them to more rather than less material methods.

Is there one among the readers of these lines who is waiting for some new and special revelation before submitting himself to Christ? Then it will never come. To get more you must be loyal to what you have. Until you do, you will become less and less

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susceptible to spiritual impression. Do you not see that the very calmness and indifference with which you can pass through a Sabbath evening service, with all its hallowed associations, its tender memories, and its searching appeals, is a most appalling symptom?

If a similar loss of sensation were to take place in your physical system you would grow white with fear. Suppose that as you hold this book in your hand, your left side were suddenly to become numb. What a cold dread would at once seize your heart! And shall the highest side of your nature be threatened with paralysis and yet evoke no fear? We would not for a moment put more upon this parable than it is intended to bear, but it certainly teaches that though conscience may be drugged or dragooned into insensibility, it will have an awful awakening. It is simply in a condition of suspended susceptibility. It is true that you may smite it deaf and dumb and blind, and think that for ever you have done with and outgrown it. But no!—unless, indeed, you have outgrown God! For God is behind conscience, Sinai with its ten thousand thunders is behind conscience. The great white throne will be found behind conscience, and you who have trifled with it will meet it again. It will rise in awful majesty and accuse you. It will smite you through and through with bitter memories, and take its terrible revenges for neglect and abuse.

XV

The Stewardship of Life

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods, &c.—MATT. xxv. 14-30.

THE Parable of the Talents sets forth life under the aspect of stewardship. It is a plain and straightforward parable, involving no elements of mystery. Its terms require for their interpretation no fine philosophic gift, no psychological insight. The meaning lies plainly on the surface, and easily within the grasp of the most matter-of-fact mind. One cannot but feel that if the kingdom of heaven be as here represented by Jesus Christ, then it marvellously corresponds with the kingdom of earth. To gain this view of correspondence is no small advantage. Christianity has been frequently discredited by the mistaken assumption that, in order to its study, one had to suspend his ordinary methods of thought, and come up to it as to a great exception—as though the forces of the spiritual kingdom pursued an inverted order, behaving capriciously and apart from law.

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How any colour for this assumption could ever have been extracted from the teachings of Christ by the would-be exponents of His gospel is difficult to understand. One would have thought that the most elementary acquaintance with the manifesto of His kingdom would have guarded them from so fatal a mistake. We say 'fatal' advisedly, because men at once, and rightly, begin to suspect any system that asks for a suspension of their intelligence, or requires them, on the threshold of their investigations, to divest themselves of common sense. So far from this being a requirement in relation to the gospel, Christ was for ever urging men to bring their ordinary business intelligence to bear upon the great questions relating to God and the soul.

In the parables particularly, it was not to the deeply contemplative and philosophical type of mind that He appealed, but to the practical, everyday intelligence of the 'man in the street,' who wanted truth translated into the concrete, and in terms that he could handle and readily understand. Christ declined to treat the truths of His kingdom as though they required some specialized and highly trained intelligence to be realized and understood. It is admitted that the kingdom of heaven holds truths that challenge the mightiest powers of the human mind ; but then so does the kingdom of earth.

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Yet a man can be the subject of both, enjoying all their chartered liberties, without passing any examination in science or philosophy. The knowledge of mysteries is not a requirement essential to entrance ; on the contrary, entrance is essential to the knowledge of mysteries, and a man must come into both kingdoms as a little child, or he cannot come in at all.

Christ does not hesitate to appeal to the commercial instincts of men. He invites them to test the kingdom of God by their customary standards. When, on a certain occasion, He asked the eminently practical question, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own life?' He was simply saying, in effect, 'Bring your highly specialized business instincts to the study of this question. You are accustomed, every day of the week and every hour of the day to test every proposed investment with the crucial question, "Will it pay?" Now, do not drop that test question when you come to deal with spiritual quantities, for the kingdom of God will submit to the same processes of investigation, to the same everyday tests, as the kingdom of man.' In the parable before us it is the practical and everyday side of the new kingdom that is brought into view. Clearly it is not a kingdom of inverted principles or topsy-turvy methods,

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but one that is run on common-sense business lines such as must commend themselves to every shrewd and practical mind. It is a kingdom in which diligence, forethought, and enterprise are rewarded by promotion and increased responsibility, while indolence and default are sternly rebuked and penalized.

Now, these are matters that should appeal strongly to practical men in a practical age. There is nothing mysterious or exceptional here ; it is what they are themselves doing every day. And Christ is simply saying, in effect, that God runs His business just as wise men run theirs.

This, then, is a plain and straightforward story. Here is a capitalist who, for some unexplained reason, is required to travel. Instead of placing his money in the bank, where it would earn a merely nominal interest, he resolves to appoint three of his employés as trustees of his estate, in different degrees of stewardship according to their capacity, thus enabling them to do a service both for him and themselves. These officers are represented as being very unequal in ability, and this is a touch which every employer will at once recognize as true to life.

Clearly there is no encouragement here for the idea that all men are equal, and that they should be treated alike. The only equitable sense in which

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men can be treated alike is in the adjustment of opportunity to their capacity, and this is precisely what is represented in the parable as having been done.

The varying degrees of capacity in these men are expressed in the varying amounts allotted to their charge, so that their business ability has to be stated as existing in the ratio of 5, 2, and 1. That is, the first man had more than twice the ability of the second, and five times that of the third. Here, then, is a permanent principle disclosed as governing the kingdom of heaven—that stewardship is measured by capacity. Men's duties, and consequently their obligations, are graduated to their power of discharge. Christ does not say that this is always so in the kingdom of man. He makes it so in the parable, that the analogy may be complete. But it is ever so in the kingdom of God. Every man will be held responsible up to the level of his power. But neither power nor responsibility can be a fixed quantity in any individual, because loyalty is for ever carrying capacity upward to higher degrees of efficiency, and is thereby heightening accountability, for increased capacity is always accompanied by increased trust. Ability and accountability thus keep pace in the ascending scale.

In the case of disloyalty, however, and consequently of lessened capacity, there is no corresponding diminu-

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tion of responsibility, and this is the tragedy of the situation. However much a man may reduce his power by his default in duty, his accountability remains unalterably the same. We are responsible for all we might have been and might have done. The question of accountability will emerge later, but it is desirable at this point to thrust one thought into relief—the dominant note of the parable. And it is this: life is a stewardship. Not an idle and irresponsible thing, to be frittered away in folly and amusement; but a great and solemn trust, to be guarded from desecration, to be administered with fidelity, and strenuously directed to the highest ends.

What are we doing with these lives of ours? Let us fetch ourselves up with this question, for here is a stewardship that may well arrest the pulse and pale the brow of every defaulter. We are hurrying on to our account. We have to reckon with God—One who knows the secret history of every transaction, and who will examine every voucher at the final audit of our accounts; One who will turn the searchlight of eternity upon all the deeds of time. There is nothing secret that shall not be revealed, nor hidden that shall not be known. Whether we have done our diligent best with the trust committed to our care, or turned the precious stream of life to the

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working of ungodly ends, or simply let its precious fluid run to wicked and wanton waste—all will be heard and made manifest at the great assize. It is this fact of final audit and disclosure that invests life with such awfulness, and surrounds it with such an atmosphere of overwhelming solemnity.

‘Two things,’ said Immanuel Kant, ‘fill me with awe—the starry heavens above my head, and the sense of accountability within my breast.’ Would that, under the shadow of this great truth, every reader of these lines might go out into the quiet night and adjust himself with God!

The supreme interest of the situation in this parable culminates in the reckoning-day. ‘After a long time the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them.’ The word translated ‘reckoneth’ is the ordinary Greek word for ‘settling up.’ Life, according to this teaching, is a trust, for which a strict account must be rendered. We cannot do better than elaborate this thought. If there is one thing more than another required to-day it is the deepening of this sense of accountability. The careless and almost flippant way in which men talk and act with regard to the most deeply sacred of all obligations is not only a personal but a social peril. After all, the ties which bind men into the unity of a social organism are moral, not material.

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Once let the sense of responsibility sit lightly on us, and the social fabric will totter to its fall. The temper that resents law, that repudiates responsibility, and is impatient of restraint, is at quarrel with the spirit of the universe. Seriousness is, after all, the dominant note even of Nature. She may frequently wear a smiling aspect and break into fair and fragrant bloom, but she is keyed, nevertheless, to the strain of duty. Indeed, the joy and beauty of nature are found, on examination, to root themselves in loyalty to this law. In Wordsworth's 'Ode to Duty' this truth is clearly seen, and finely stated :

Stern lawgiver ! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace ;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face ;
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads ;
Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee
are fresh and strong.

Now, this is the healthy sentiment of a soul that lived near to Nature's heart, and was attuned to law — a soul that was in harmony with the universal spirit, and from which nothing could be more foreign than the trifling and irresponsible air that takes life no more seriously than if it were a picnic or a waltz. Better the most solemn-faced and self-repressive

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puritanism, with its unflinching adherence to duty, than the brainless and butterfly whirl in the round of which so many are giggling out their days. I am no advocate for a stern and sombre asceticism that would frown down and freeze at their fount the pleasures of life ; but if it came to a choice between it and the vapid and fatuous epicureanism of the day, with its narrow horizons, its vulgar selfism, its mental and moral destitution, its contempt of obligation, its everlasting drivel, and its idiotic simper, then give me the asceticism seven times over and steeped in sevenfold gloom.

Any mood is preferable to one of frivolous irresponsibility, because the irresponsible mood is false to facts. We live under law. However distasteful this may be to some folk, it is a fact; and to ignore facts is unscientific, while to argue against them is poor philosophy. Life is not a go-as-you-please and do-as-you-like tournament ; it is a stewardship under laws, and, as every business man knows, law is nowhere so stern and unbending in its demand for fidelity as in the fulfilment of fiduciary relations.

This relation of life to law has been powerfully brought home to us by the modern discoveries of scientific men. Science reveals to us a universe roofed and floored, walled and lined, bolted and

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braced, with law. But the presence of law implies a Law-maker above and behind law, and operating through it to the furtherance of His ends. Natural law must never be conceived of apart from the personal will of the Supreme.

Our very discoveries in the realm of nature have had the effect, to many minds at least, of exhausting the world of God. As though the mere fact of our having unveiled the method by which He works out His sovereign purposes in nature were a sufficient reason for ignoring at such points of discovery the Personal Will of which laws are merely the expression and effect! We might as well expect to do without our electric power-house because we have discovered the wires along which the electrical energy streams to work the trains and trams, or to dispense with our reservoirs because we can uncover the mains of our water supply. Behind the energy that electrifies our railway system we must postulate a dynamo, behind our running household tap we must postulate a reservoir; and behind all the laws and forces that flow around us in nature we must postulate God.

The physical universe is organized mind; it is embodied purpose working to far-off and intelligent ends. Sir Oliver Lodge, one of the foremost pioneers of physical science, said recently: 'The existence of

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a highest being is a fundamental element in every religious creed, and I maintain that it is hopelessly unscientific to imagine it possible that man is the highest intelligent existence.'

What we call laws of nature, then, are simply the registered movements of the Divine Will expressed in the terms of matter and force; and with these laws, as dwellers in nature, we have each to do. Leaving for the moment all moral considerations out of the question, we are accountable to physical laws. They are for ever reckoning with us, sending in their bills and distraining on our goods. Walk the wards of any hospital, visit the cells of any lunatic asylum, and you will see Nature squaring her accounts with violated law. These laws can neither be bluffed nor bribed. Irresistible in their sweep, they cannot be opposed without disastrous results. They will submit to no permanent modification; they admit no statute of limitation; they know nothing of substitution or compromise. We cannot effect a little arrangement with Nature to pay half a crown in the pound; she demands the uttermost farthing.

Is it safe, then, to imagine that the administration of the moral world will be less exact than the physical, or run on less rigid lines? We are moving on to judgement. Of course, in one sense, every day is a day of judgement; every day the balance is

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struck, and our debit or credit carried forward. I am not concerned to contend for a literal judgement-seat, and all the pomp and circumstance of a legal tribunal, before which we shall be arraigned, and with which the imagery of Scripture has made us familiar. Yet there is that in these scenes of final judgement that may well blanch the cheek of the bravest. Dare any of us go up to that final audit on our record as it stands? But One stands at our side—an unseen but real Personality—who has won the right on Calvary to appear on our behalf, and only waits to be retained.

Having dealt with the certainty of the reckoning day, let us now look at its disclosures and its dooms. In the case of the defaulting servant it is significant that the doom is made to turn entirely on a negative. There is no charge of misappropriation or misuse of funds; it was rather a case of non-appropriation and disuse. The delinquent did not do anything to depreciate the value of the stocks committed to him. There was no defalcation. He did not turn his master's money to any base end, nor did he make it serve his own personal and private interests. He neither drank nor gambled it away. He simply did nothing with it at all, excepting to withdraw it from circulation. But by doing this he arrested its currency and robbed it of reproductive power.

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Before going any further, it will be well to inquire as to what we are to understand by the word 'talent' in this parable. And at this point we shall find ourselves compelled to dissent from the accepted interpretation, which everywhere has identified 'talent' with 'ability.' Indeed, so general has been this mistaken identification, that the word 'talent' has become everywhere the synonym for personal endowment. That it did not mean anything of the kind as it fell from Christ's lips becomes so obvious on reading the parable with even ordinary care, that one can only marvel that such an error should not only have arisen but have been allowed to pass unchallenged into world-wide currency.

If, as is written, the master gave to each of his servants 'according to his several ability,' then clearly the talent was intended to symbolize something apart from his ability—something that was measured by it. It was a thing that could be handled, seen, exchanged, multiplied, diminished, buried, forfeited, transferred, or any one of a thousand different things; while the man's ability was an inward faculty or power—part, in fact, of the man's mental make-up, and inseparable from his true and proper personality. It could be no more transferred from one man to another than could hearing or sight.

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We are not disputing the principle that the use of faculty makes for its increased efficiency, and that extirpation is the penalty for neglect. This is a great and solemn truth, affirmed by Scripture and endorsed by Nature in a thousand ways. But it is not the truth that this parable was designed to teach. The great lesson sought to be enforced in this story seems to be that opportunity will expand with fidelity, or contract, even to confiscation, through neglect. Of course, it is a very safe deduction that the five-talent man not only increased his capital by his diligence, but also his capacity for business enterprise and his confidence in controlling affairs. Yet this, after all, is only secondary to the main purpose, which must be steadily kept in view.

It is a question of opportunity, then, rather than ability, with which we are faced—opportunity served out as a trust, and on the scale of ability as possessed by the several stewards.

This last point must not be forgotten. The man who received the one talent had as much ability for dealing with his trust as the man with five for dealing with his. Each was weighted up to his carrying and managing power. But the successful men possessed, in addition to their mental ability, moral qualities which brought their ability into action; while the unsuccessful man failed, not

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through any want of capacity—he does not plead incapacity—but through indisposition to bring his capacity into play.

The parable is expressed in terms of the money-market; but it proves how, in the achievement of merely financial success, certain great moral principles must rule. By making this defaulter forfeit his talent Christ lays hold of a universal business principle and shows how it runs out into the spiritual realm and controls the administration of the kingdom of God. It is a principle that commends itself at once, not only to common sense, but to every instinct of justice and fair play. As a matter of fact, opportunities are not dangled indefinitely in the face of the indolent and vacillating man. This would demoralize business by giving a premium to sloth. Moreover, it would not only be unfair to the diligent and dutiful, but also react with moral disaster on the lazy man himself.

It has passed into a proverb that if you want anything done, and done expeditiously, you must get a busy man to do it. This is only another way of saying, 'Take, therefore, the talent or opportunity from the defaulter, and give it unto him that hath ten.'

The reward of diligence is more work, for the simple reason that fidelity to duty heightens capacity,

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and thus calls for ampler fields in which to exercise its powers. This is the only reward that the true man asks—that, as his abilities rise in the scale of power, their sphere of action may proportionably expand.

He desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just,
To rest in a golden grove, or to bask in a summer sky :
Give him the wages of going on, and not to die.

The complaint against the defaulting servant turns out, on analysis, to be a complaint that, when he felt unequal to doing the best thing, he failed to do the second best. Assuming what would be sure to happen in such a case—that he had before him the example of his more successful comrades, whose trading prosperity would be manifest—he must have felt the rebuke which their diligence conveyed. Their success would awaken his apprehensions. The more they achieved, the more prominently would his default be thrown into relief. He feels the sting of self-reproach ; but the reflex action of conscious delinquency, instead of spurring him to increased activity, lowers his efficiency by smiting him with timidity, and sets him casting about for excuse. He seeks to shift the blame on to the conditions of his stewardship : 'I knew thee, that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not scattered ; and I was afraid.'

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Assuming it to have been true that his master was in the habit of thrusting in his sickle where he had never scattered seed, in this particular instance at any rate the remark was peculiarly irrelevant, for this man's field had not been left unsown. It was a piece of unpardonable impertinence, but wonderfully true to life. What knowledge of human nature Christ displays ! 'He needed not that any should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.' This insolent defaulter is made to type in his effrontery the querulous and cynical disposition of the unsuccessful man, whose failure in life is due entirely to causes lying within the compass of his own personality, and over which he has complete control. It was a lame and impotent excuse, and quite in harmony with the general character of the man. He was too lazy even to think correctly ; because the only logical conclusion from his reasoning was not indolence, but the necessity to be actively employed to get things done. Imagine going into a city warehouse and finding an employé lolling about on a pile of blankets, who explained that his excessive languor was due to the fact that his employer was a martinet who would not stand anything in the way of leisure. Would you not at once express your surprise at behaviour so manifestly at variance with the explana-

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tion proffered? And so with the servant in the parable: the policy he pursued could be justified only on the assumption of an easy and go-as-you-please employer who would exact no strict and accurate account from those he had placed in trust.

Obviously his conduct was contradictory to his creed, so that out of his own mouth he was condemned. The master's tone of indignant surprise is finely conveyed in the words, 'Thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I did not scatter. Thou oughtest, therefore, to have put my money to the bankers, and then at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest.' That is to say, 'If you were so paralysed with fear that you could not do anything with your entrusted capital yourself, why did you not take it to some one who could and would?' This was the next best thing.

The lesson here taught is the claim of the second best. There may be some who read these lines to whom the second best is the only available thing. Well, get at it, and without delay, because the reckoning is hurrying on and the audit will soon be here. Never mind if you fail. Better far to fail in an honest effort than never to try. We want the courage that will dare to fail. Give me

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the man who battles on manfully against opposition, though frequently beaten back, baffled, and sore, rather than the one who treads the dead levels of indifferent acquiescence or moves unresistingly down the slopes of unstinted desire. But you say, 'I have failed so often.' Well, so have we all. It is not so much that men fall, but which way they are facing when they fall, that counts. If the defaulter in our parable had failed in an honest effort to do his best with the talent which he had in trust, he too would have received the commendation of his lord. He broke down in the region of his intent, and hence his condemnation. Life to all of us is a stewardship for which we shall be called to account. It will be idle in that day to throw blame on circumstance. The human will should be superior to all circumstance. Though it may not be always able to translate itself into action, still there is no excuse whatever for its relaxation.

Let me close with the strong lines of Henley, which, though somewhat pagan in their tone, yet express this truth in a way that in these days of compromise is like an iron tonic to the blood :

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.

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In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the horror of the shade ;
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll ;
I am the master of my fate ;
I am the captain of my soul.

XVI

The Moral Purpose of Peril

Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?—I COR. xv. 30.

THE San Francisco disaster of 1906 had the effect, for a time at least, of shaking the world out of its easy-going self-complacency. There is nothing that can effect this so thoroughly as an earthquake. Even the most careless and flippant were made to think and feel. Any one who could read the story of that swift and overthrowing desolation without a pang of sympathetic distress would indeed have had to possess a heart of stone. We have no intention of recapitulating the horrors with which the Press has made us familiar. Our purpose is rather to suggest if possible some philosophy wide enough to embrace and harmonize two such apparently contradictory and mutually exclusive facts as an earthquake and the All-Fatherly goodness of God.

In view of such disaster and desolation, the question springs unbidden to our lips: 'To what purpose is

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this waste?' If we can only be assured that there is a background of beneficence behind these tragedies of history—that they are not meaningless and 'mingled all without a plan,' but that the whole process is wisely determined and carefully supervised, and that it moves towards a moral goal and subserves a purpose commensurate with the scale of suffering and loss which it entails, then the mind is satisfied and the heart is set at rest.

It is asserted that the great earthquake of Lisbon in 1755, coming as it did on All Saints' Day, when the churches and cathedrals were thronged with devoted worshippers, did more to unsettle men's faith in the goodness of God than all the infidel literature of the eighteenth century combined. And we can quite believe it.

The problem, of course, is no new one. It has repeatedly emerged through the centuries, and as repeatedly has it plunged the more pious and thoughtful spirits of the time into a condition of intellectual despair. John Stuart Mill, in his plain, blunt way, has stated the problem in the form of a dilemma: 'If God be all-good, then He cannot be all-powerful: and if He be all-powerful, then He cannot be all-good.' Tennyson has woven the philosophic doubt and the despair of its intellectual

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solution into the sweetest and most plaintive of verse :

Are God and Nature then at strife,
That Nature lends such evil dreams ?
So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life ;

That I, considering everywhere
Her secret meaning in her deeds,
And finding that of fifty seeds
She often brings but one to bear,

I falter where I firmly trod,
And, falling with my weight of cares
Upon the great world's altar-stairs
That slope thro' darkness up to God,

I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,
And gather dust and chaff, and call
To what I feel is Lord of all,
And faintly trust the larger hope.

In reply to John Stuart Mill's dilemma, let it be pointed out, without anticipating what must be said later, that God is not all-powerful in any sense of being able to work either physical or moral contradictions.

He is no more able than we to make two produced parallel lines meet, or to make two straight lines capable of enclosing a space. Neither is God able to produce moral character without providing alternatives of choice and a fair field on which the human will shall have free opportunity of either winning for

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itself through resistance to evil a securer realm, or of losing through submission to the temper of the hour its regal sceptre and crown.

The text which we have selected for the discussion of this problem occurs in the masterly argument for the doctrine of a future life, in which the Apostle Paul thus incidentally refers to the risks which he and his fellow apostles were perpetually taking for the sake of Christ and the spread of His truth. The point he wishes to make is that such risks were utterly illogical apart from the hope of a resurrection and that they could be justified only on the assumption of a compensating life beyond the grave. The underlying principle of this contention is that the voluntary acceptance of risk for one's own life demands a mental and a moral justification.

In stating this principle Paul was saying a greater, a grander, a far more inclusive thing than probably he himself imagined. He was simply finding a justification for apostolic contempt of danger and death. As a matter of fact, however, he was at the same time unconsciously furnishing a key to the moral government of God. Look at it for a moment. If it be necessary that a human being should be able adequately to justify the exposure of himself to risk by showing that over against the probable loss of life or limb that may result there is some far-reaching

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and overwhelming gain, then clearly and *a fortiori* the Infinite Personality whom we call God, who daily exposes the whole human race to the peril of earthquake and pestilence, famine and flood, and the thousand and one ills to which our mortal flesh is heir, must have some all-sufficient justification of His administration that will meet the claims of intellect and heart.

If the children without good reason may not expose themselves to danger, then surely if they are so exposed by the Great Father Himself, He must have ends so full and satisfying as to leave absolutely no room for question as to either His infinite wisdom or love.

We are born without our consent, and ushered, whether we will or no, into a universe where unnumbered troubles await us. We are exposed at every step and on every side to the hostile forces of nature, against which we have perpetually to protect ourselves, with, at the best, merely doubtful and temporary success. We are overmatched from the start. Nature carries too many guns for us. It is only a question of time as to when we shall have to strike our flag. Life is a continuous process of adjustment to checkmate these forces of death. Is it, therefore, any wonder that we should turn round occasionally and inquire as to why we are thus

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placed in jeopardy every hour? Intellect and heart are quite within their rights when they demand an explanation of the pitfalls and man-traps that lie about our path.

The reply to the question of the text is threefold, because there is a trinity of interests that has to be subserved. Body, mind, and soul have each to be cultured and advanced from more to more. Thus our investigation opens up lines along which we could move for hours. But let us be brief, and bracket the first two. Science has demonstrated that physical perfection has been reached through slow processes of evolution and of warfare with the forces that have threatened to destroy. We have to look for our finest types of physical manhood where nature has compelled men to fight or die, to work or starve. It is under the stress and through the discipline of rigorous necessity that the perfection of physical form and fitness has been reached. Whether in the matter of body or brain there can be no development apart from struggle, and no struggle apart from difficulty. Manhood can come to all-round perfection of symmetry and strength only through discipline. But discipline at once suggests imperfect co-ordination of life with its setting—absence of adjustment to environment. It is in this imperfect correspondence that the struggle of life is begotten, the issue of which is the unfolding

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of power. We are driven, therefore, to the conclusion that if man was ever to come to his best, physically or mentally, he had to be placed in an imperfect world. That is to say, he had to be set amid such hostile conditions as would, by awaking resistance, evoke his latent forces and necessitate the output of his power. Robert Browning has finely expressed this pressure of apparently unfriendly circumstance in 'Rabbi Ben Ezra,' under the metaphor of a potter's wheel—

He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,

This Present, thou forsooth wouldest fain arrest ;
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,

Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed.

Hence it comes to pass that we find ourselves in this world, not registered as guests in a spacious hotel where everything has been ready made for our accommodation, and where all we have to do is to press a button in order to summon a waiter and have things altered if they do not suit; but, on the contrary, as pupils under a rigorous régime, to be graduated in a course of instruction, and often under a discipline of pain and misery and tears. It is not ours to command, but to obey; and any power that we may acquire over the forces that threaten our dissolution is gained through submission to their

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laws. Our first grand necessity is to ascertain the laws and conditions of our schoolhouse, and become familiar with the materials with which we have to work. We have to be taught our limitations, and trained to the legitimate use of our powers. We have had to learn, and at tremendous cost, the laws relating to health and sickness, food and drink, fire and flood, poisonous acids, noxious gases, and the thousand and one destructive agencies of nature that ambush our path. The perpetual adjustment that this necessitates becomes educational in the highest degree. Is it not the very roughness of Nature and the fierceness of her forces that have evoked and developed our sciences and arts? The perils of the mine, the dangers of the deep, the wholesale sacrifice of life through the neglect or violation of physical laws, the wasting of pestilence and plague—these have been the means of so taxing the ingenuity and mental resources of the human brain that almost every day some fresh discovery is announced that makes for the cure or prevention of disease, the alleviation of distress, and the comfort and safety of life. But how would all this have been brought about had nature been but a padded playground or a hollow lotos-land in which there was nought to fear and nothing to do but 'rest in a golden grove or bask in a summer sky'?

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The present-day capacity of the human brain is the product of the pressure and peril under which life has to be lived. The ordinary mind has no conception of the brain-work that is being constantly expended in providing for the greater safety and satisfaction of human life. Take an illustration from the great goldfields of Australia. First of all the precious metal was found easily on the surface, thus serving to attract men to the field. Then, as by design, it led men beneath the surface, that they might be educated in the process of its acquisition. Deeper and deeper it descended, calling for engineering skill before it would surrender itself to the hand of man. Then, when brought to the surface, it has had frequently to be treated by mechanical, chemical, and electrical processes, which have led to the invention and construction of some of the most marvellous combinations of plant for dealing with refractory ores. The very difficulties and dangers of mining have provided a magnificent school for the leading out of the very highest powers of the chemist, the metallurgist, the electrician, and the engineer. In developing our mines we have been developing our men, which is a much more important and valuable result. Here is wealth far outweighing all the gold or silver that ever was mined, and due entirely to the difficulties and dangers with which we have been confronted.

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The very perils of life have been turned into a mental gymnasium for the development of man's inventive power. Only a small proportion of the thousands who avail themselves of modern inventions have any notion of the amount of time expended by scientific men in simply reducing the area of risk in human life. The writer was recently spending a week-end with a steel specialist, to whom was sent a fragment of a fractured wheel from a recent railway accident. It was the business of the specialist to discover why that wheel broke. We went into his laboratory together. There on the shelves were bottles containing borings of standard steels. Taking a piece of the required standard the specialist placed it in a test-tube containing a solution of nitric acid, which speedily dissolved the steel. He then took an equal quantity of the metal to be tested, and put it into a second test-tube with an equal quantity of nitric acid. Upon being dissolved, the solution that was in question was compared with the standard, and the difference in colour gave the difference in quality between the two. Next, a portion of the metal to be tested was highly polished by being held on a revolving flannel disc, upon which there was being delivered a tiny stream of what is known as 'jeweller's red.' This brought the surface up to a polish of a very high degree. This polished surface

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was then placed beneath a microscope, over the microscope was placed a camera, and a photograph was thus taken of the polished surface. After this there was dropped upon this polished surface a quantity of nitric acid, which presently bit its way through the outer skin, revealing the inner structure of the steel. This inner structure was also placed beneath the microscope and photographed, after which both photographs were thrown by means of a lantern on to a screen, and the whole story of why the metal fractured was read by the expert eye of the specialist as though from a book. He could tell by the revealed structure whether there was sufficient carbon or not in its composition, whether it had entered into right combination, whether the metal had been poured out too hot or too cold, too fast or too slow, or whether it had broken through sheer 'fatigue.' It was a veritable day of judgement, and by its revelations could be tracked the person or persons to whose default the breakage was due.

But what does all this show? Does it not demonstrate how the very perils of life and its modern conditions are making for the highest scientific accuracy in manufacture, and carrying to a higher degree of efficiency the brain-power of the race? So that for purely physical and mental reasons it is well that we 'stand in jeopardy every hour.'

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The advantages on the moral side are, of course, based on the assumption of a life beyond the grave. If this life be all, and our existence terminates in the tomb, then it must be conceded that there is no adequate reason why we should not play truant from this world-school when lessons are difficult and things go hard. But if this life be but the preparation-time for a larger life, to whose vaster orbits our spirits will yet be bent and bound, then every task and every tear acquires a value and significance of quite transcendent scale. The moral peril of our age, from which we must be delivered at any and every cost, is materialism—not philosophical, because that is dead, slain, too, by scientific hands!—but practical materialism.

We are so deceived by appearances that it requires the stimulus of an earthquake shock occasionally to break the spell of their enchantment, to adjust the moral vision, and to set things in their true relations. We lack moral perspective; we have no proper sense of proportion. We are for ever confounding the accidental with the essential, the transient with the abiding in human affairs. But at great crises in our history the scales drop from our eyes, the things that we had written off as losses turn out to be our greatest gains, while our so-called profits turn to dust and ashes in our hands.

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Now there is nothing like an earthquake for this purpose. It shakes our most solid investments. Against disease and fire and famine and flood we can make provision. But an earthquake is a disturbance so fundamental in its nature, so humanly unmanageable, and so irreducible to law, that men can only helplessly take it as it comes. It is the one thing above all others that shatters men's faith in the temporal order, and sets them seeking for 'a city that hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.' It may be safely said that an earthquake would do more than ten thousand sermons to impress the imagination with the instability of earthly things.

Any discipline, however severe, by which such a distrust of the temporal can be induced as shall drive man to seek for refuge in the eternal, is a discipline that should be welcomed and acquiesced in rather than deplored. Let these disasters be but the means of calling men to attention and reminding them that this is not their resting-place—that, as Emerson says, 'we are only encamped in nature, not domesticated,' and that yonder is our home—then the moral gain in personal character will far surpass the loss of property and life. For this, then, 'we stand in jeopardy every hour,' that our attention may be won to things unseen. 'For the

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things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.'

It is because there is nothing here that can survive the shock of our final doom, that the loving Father of our spirits seeks by these disciplinary processes to throw us back on the eternal. It is because the houses that we build must totter into ruin and decay, that we are invited to become children in the 'house not made with hands.' It is because there is no anchorage here that will enable us to outride the final storm, that we are encouraged to cast our anchor far within the veil!

XVII

The Retributive Aspect of Love

The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.—ROM. i. 18.

(T)HE Fatherhood of God is the dominant note of the New Testament Scriptures, as the Sovereignty of God is that of the Old. Fatherhood is the final and completed revelation of the Divine. It is, in fact, the focal point towards which all the scattered rays of revealed truth converge, the point in which they cohere and find their unity. Such being the case, we are bound to interpret every scriptural presentation of the divine character, every announcement of His purposes and plans for the race, in strict harmony with this latest revelation.

Everything must be construed through the conception of Fatherhood, or it will be misconstrued. Anything that cannot be harmonized therewith must be relentlessly cut out of our creed. In accordance with this principle, the 'wrath of God' must be so conceived and presented as not to conflict with

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His love. Love is the essence of God's mysterious nature; it is the active principle of His being. His omnipotence, His omniscience, His omnipresence, are all the servants of His love. Love is the regulative principle directing and controlling all the divine activities — creative, redemptive, and retributive.

It is with the retributive aspect and action of the divine love that we are confronted in our text. Love and wrath, so far from being mutually exclusive and contradictory terms, involve one another. Indeed, in proportion to the purity and intensity of the divine love will be the fierceness of its indignation against that which would defeat its ends. There must be this possibility of wrath in love to redeem it from weakness, and there must be love in wrath to redeem both it from revenge and its victim from despair. The wrath of God, then, is a necessary element of His love, without which it would be a simpering, saccharine sentiment unworthy of so dignified a name.

That without which a man's character would be incomplete cannot be conceived as absent from the character of God. In Him all that is purest and noblest must be lifted to its highest power. Similarly, anything that would be unworthy of an earthly father cannot be predicated of the Father which is

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in heaven. To regard God as incapable of moral indignation against sin is to emasculate and degrade our conception of His character, and fill us with distrust of His moral government.

Look at it in this way. Here is a lad, the product of a pious home. He has had the privilege of a godly father's counsels and a saintly mother's prayers. They have spared no self-denial to equip him for the battle of life. His education has been the best that money could procure. When he leaves school he decides upon a commercial career. His father brings all the influence he can exert to secure him an opening in a leading financial institution. Step by step he moves up till he reaches the most trusted position. He has now a home of his own, a loving wife, and a group of happy-hearted children. He is looked up to and respected as an upright and honoured citizen, while his now aged parents gladden the evening of their life with thankful memories of all they went without in their early married career to help their boy to the proud position which he now enjoys. Then, amid all this peace and happiness in the golden evening of their life, suddenly, like a bolt from the blue, comes a disaster compared with which the news of his death would have been a delight—a disaster of humiliation and disgrace, the dreadful *dénouement* of a long series of cleverly

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contrived frauds, extending through a period of many years, a disaster that breaks the heart of his mother, brings down the grey hairs of his father with sorrow to the grave, renders his wife and family homeless and disgraced, besides plunging countless families, whose securities he has manipulated and misappropriated, into poverty and distress.

Now think, is that the kind of thing which a righteous God can be regarded as viewing with complacency? Does not every moral instinct insist that such a course of conduct would awaken the divine indignation and wrath? The daily press recently reported one of the blackest pieces of villainy on record for many a day. A young fellow, without home or friends, was given a home, in which he grew up as one of the family. He married one of the daughters, and not only turned her life into a hell, but took advantage of his relationship with her family, and the privileges it carried, to ruin two of her younger sisters. What ought to be God's relation to a ruffian like that? Ought God to be at peace with him? If so, He would be no God to you or me! My sense of security in the moral government of the Most High springs out of the assurance that such a man will be pursued relentlessly by the Nemesis of retribution, that will track him down to his latest hiding-place,

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and drag him forth, confronting him with his sin, till its hideous deformity rouses his hate, and causes him for ever to revolt against the wrong he has done. If I did not believe in such a God I would not be His minister. I would not hold a commission under a Being whose indignation did not burn at white heat against so great a crime. But, blessed be God, His moral indignation is represented in our text as revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who hold the truth in unrighteousness.

Let it be clearly held, in spite of much sentimentalism of a sickly kind, that wide though the universe may be, there is no successful hiding-place for the wrongdoer. Sooner or later, here or there, he will be faced with his record. There is no escape, and one of two things must be done with our moral debit. It must be carried forward or cancelled.

The condition of character described in the text as awakening the divine indignation remains now to be considered. It may mean one in which a full knowledge of what is right co-exists with the deliberate practice of what is wrong—that is a life in which creed and conduct have suffered divorce. Or, what is worse, it may mean a life in which the very truth itself is abused and perverted to ungodly

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ends. The phrase 'hold the truth' means here to suppress it; the Revised Version gives 'hold down.' But suppression presupposes possession, and to possess the truth in this sense cannot mean less than to hold a belief in God and duty, coupled with a recognition of all the claims and sanctions of the moral law. It is at least to have an awakened conscience, an instructed moral sense, and to understand the sacredness of obligation. He who thus possesses the truth must have caught the voice and vision of the ideal as it beckoned toward the higher life. Yet, in spite of calls from without and promptings from within, he turns from the shining vision of truth and purity and quenches the torch of conscience. He says 'No' to all the pleading voices that call him upward to the sunlit heights, and bends his steps towards the depths, that, under cover of their friendly shade, he may more securely work his deeds of shame. But he who is thus disloyal to the truth cannot retain his perception of it. We cannot be disloyal to the light and maintain the optic nerve in working order.

This is a law that works with dread inevitableness in all realms—he that forbears to do when he knows shall cease knowing what to do. It is the law of judicial blindness and moral induration. It is the method of divine penalty and a manifestation of the

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indignation of God. It is part of the process of recovery through discipline. When a man knows the right and deliberately refuses it, mind and heart are at discord. The unity and harmony of life are broken. In the microcosm of his own personality is rehearsed and foreshadowed the tragedy of doom. Every man comprises within himself a miniature court of justice. He is self-arraigned, self-convicted, self-sentenced, and self-scourged, and this judgement within is prophetic of the judgement beyond. Never was prophecy more true.

Retribution is a great fact, and it is not to be disposed of by being ignored. Moreover, it is a fact the foundation of which is laid not merely on the authoritative word from above, but deeply and broadly in the very nature of things. Men talk sometimes about the conflict between religion and science, or between the Bible and nature; but here, at any rate, there is no conflict, for while Paul, the apostle, in the name of revelation, links up the wrongdoing of man with the revealed wrath of God, Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, affirms 'to separate pain from ill-doing is to fight against the constitution of things, and will inevitably be followed by more pain.'

Thus the closing word of revelation and the modern word of science unite in affirming that retribution

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must follow in the footsteps of the violated law. So then, my sceptical friend, you may dismiss your Bible if you will, but you do not thereby dismiss the doctrine of retribution. It is written all through the book of nature and on every page. And there is just this difference between the two books—and note it well before it be too late—that whereas in the Book of Revelation over against this gloomy doctrine of retribution and despair there is written, in radiant letters of light, the glorious gospel of a new and immortal hope, in the book of nature there is no gospel unfolded, and for the hapless transgressor there is nothing but a doom. Nature is most relentless in the exaction of her penalties, and you only need to walk the wards of any hospital or asylum for the insane to see how she squares her account with sin. But in all the divine methods of penalty there is no feeling of vindictiveness or revenge. Behind it all there is the moral purpose of a love that never falters, and in front of it there is a moral goal towards which that love must ever work, till sin shall cease to be.

It is God's infinite love by which all His retributive judgements are administered and controlled. Let us now examine the particular objects of the divine wrath as indicated in this verse, because their explication is necessary in order to a proper under-

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standing and application of our subject. They are set forth in our text under two words, 'Ungodliness' and 'Unrighteousness,' which, though seemingly synonymous and in some cases used interchangeably yet really connote two totally different conceptions. Ungodliness, on the one hand, signifies failure to realize and discharge the obligations due from man to God; and unrighteousness, on the other, involves a corresponding default in duty from man to man; while both are represented as deriving their guilt and liability to punishment from the fact that they are committed against the clearest light. Rightly understood, ungodliness and unrighteousness stand in the respective relation to one another of root and fruit. We simply state this now, and must leave its demonstration till later on in our study.

The term ungodliness can perhaps best be construed through its moral opposite. The word for Godliness in the New Testament has loyalty for its root idea. Thus it was understood by the Greeks centuries before its use by the Apostle Paul. That it became charged with deeper significance when taken up and employed by the New Testament writers must be conceded; but nevertheless loyalty remains the fundamental conception for which it stands. It therefore signifies the right relation of life to its supreme and sovereign Lord, its adjustment

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to a higher order, the ranging of it round a new centre, the bending of it to a vaster orbit, and the direction of it to nobler and grander, because unselfish ends.

Now, ungodliness is all this reversed. It is in its essential nature disloyalty to the supreme and sovereign Will. Our text, you will observe, assumes the Supreme, because if there be no God, clearly there can be no ungodliness. The Scriptures always assume God. The sacred writers never attempt to prove Him. The fact is that belief in God is instinctive, and to start proving our instincts amounts to denying them. The denials of the Supreme remind one of the famous criticism that the Iliad was not written by Homer, but by another person of the same name. For the atheist does not escape from God nor dispense with Him; He is still the necessary Postulate, and all the atheist does is to create an ideal substitute for Him, call it 'Necessity,' 'Force,' 'The Inscrutable,' or 'The Power not ourselves,' spell it with a capital, invest it with all the qualities of mind, and then uncover the head and bow the knee. But the Bible takes no stock of this breed, excepting to deride it.

'The fool,' says the psalmist, 'has said that there is no God.' Whether he was a fool for saying it, or said it because he was a fool, is not stated; but it

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is worthy of note that the Hebrew word for 'fool' in that verse is the word 'to wither.' It is the withered man, the man whose capacity for God has been allowed to shrink and shrivel, that pronounces this verdict. It is as unauthoritative as the opinion of a dead optic nerve on the question of light or colour, or that of a withered auditory nerve on the matter of a symphony. The opinion of a paralysed arm on the subject of pain as against the testimony of all the other members of the body would be equally valuable with that of the fool on the question of God as compared with the experience of those who, like Browning, can look up to the Infinite and say with confidence—

I need Thee, and I feel Thee, and I love Thee.

Thus, then, while atheists, pantheists, and materialists speculate as to the probable origin of things, the Bible starts off with the calm and unequivocal assertion that 'In the beginning God'—and thus meets the claim of both intellect and heart. Even Christ Himself did not stay to demonstrate; but always presupposed the idea of God. He broadened and deepened, He enriched and illuminated the conception, it is true; but it was here before He came. It has been an inalienable part of man's moral outfit—From the grey beginning of years and the twilight of things that began.

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But if God be thus the source and fount of all being, He must also be the seat and centre of all authority, to whom the allegiance of all wills is due. If this be denied, then it is idle to talk of obligation, because apart from God there is and can be no such thing. Human authority has never felt itself equal to enforce the fulfilment of everyday morality, apart from an appeal to the divine. It has always had to show itself as derived from the higher authority of the skies.

Clearly, if there be a divine Being, He must be supreme; and if He be supreme, then our duty is to Him. But duty is that which is due, and that which is due is that which we owe, and that which we owe is that which we ought, because 'ought' is simply the past tense of the verb 'to owe,' and is, as Thomas Carlyle says, 'the grandest word in our English tongue.'

By a piece of inevitable logic, then, we are led to the conclusion that godliness is a debt which every man owes to the Supreme. Let every ungodly man remember that he is a defaulter to a creditor who will accept no compromise, whose claim is absolute, and who can and will enforce payment even to the uttermost farthing.

Godliness is a debt due from the creature to the Creator, from the children of earth to the Father in

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heaven. But it is not only a debt in the ordinary sense. It is one the meeting of which should be a first charge upon man's estate. First, by a principle of law—viz. that the Crown has in certain instances, and may claim in all, the right of becoming a preferential creditor. Take the case of an insolvent estate in which the liabilities are £10,000 and the assets £1,000, and let us suppose that the insolvent owes the Crown £1,000. In such a case the Crown, as a preferential creditor, may attach the £1,000 and allow all the other creditors to go without. Of course, it may not do this, and probably would not press its claim; but it has the power to do it all the same, and need not accept a composition.

Now, God stands to us in the relation of the Crown. He is a preferential creditor. He puts in first claim upon our assets. But here a fine contrast emerges between the heavenly and the earthly Crown. God prefers His claim first, not that He may thereby lessen, but increase, our ability to meet the claims of others.

But this debt of godliness is not only a first charge on a principle of law, but also, secondly, on a principle of honour. Most men will respond to an appeal to their honour when every other argument fails. I firmly believe that if my readers who are living without God could be shown that this question of godliness is an

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affair of honour between them and the Supreme, and that therefore ungodliness is dishonourable repudiation, there is not one but would at once set about squaring his accounts with God. In our social life, as we know, there are what are understood as 'debts of honour.' And the preference is always given to these by those who are involved. These debts are not recoverable by law, and they are therefore the more promptly and conscientiously discharged. The gambler will let his butcher and his baker wait for their money, but will religiously discharge his gaming debts. We are not discussing the ethics of gambling just now, but simply pointing out that there are debts which men distinguish as obligations of honour, and to which they yield the first claim.

Now, this is precisely the class of obligation under which we are placed to the Divine. The debt which we as creatures owe to the Creator is a debt of honour. And it is to our sense of honour that the Almighty in His dealings with men appeals. With all His omnipotence, He is powerless to recover this debt by mere force of law. It is a claim of love, which love alone can satisfy. You cannot offer a greater affront to love than to reciprocate its outgoings with anything less than the affection of the heart. To God, love is the only precious thing, and you cannot meet His claims with a smaller return than

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yourselves. It is not yours that He seeks, but you. He hungers and thirsts for the love of His children. His heart must be unsatisfied and His home desolate until their return. It is our love that He seeks ; and, because it must be constrained and not compelled, He has sought it through the pain and tears and death of His dear and only Son.

In the cross of Christ we see that love in all the might of its operation, in all the wealth of its tenderness, in all the abandonment of its self-surrender, reaching down to the lowest depths of our fallen humanity, buying back for us our lost inheritance, and laying the basis of our restoration to the favour and image of God. In the presence of His great love for us, to withhold ours in return is disloyalty to the first and highest claim, and ingratitude in the last degree. It is to do God dishonour and ourselves disgrace.

I have sought to put this question thus in the light of a debt in the hope that it will appeal to your sense of fairness and induce a moral move in the direction of its discharge. This is not a matter of mere emotion. I want you to look at it in the daylight of an obligation incurred. This will render it simply a matter of common honesty to put yourself right with God. It does not matter in such a case about your feelings. It is a question of fact. Suppose that I owe my tailor an account for a suit of clothes, and

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when he calls for its settlement I meet him with the remark that I have no feeling on the matter. While acknowledging the debt, I assure him that I am waiting for a gush of emotion before I intend to pay, and that as a matter of fact I always like to feel deeply before parting with the cash. Well, if he be anything of a man, he will make it his business to see that the necessary feeling is awakened as speedily as possible, and in a way I neither expect nor desire. But the fact is, men do not talk such nonsense in their daily dealings with their fellow men. Once show a man that he owes, and he recognizes and responds to his obligation to pay.

When do you propose to settle the divine claim? Do you not see that every day you are at once increasing your liabilities and decreasing your assets? God claims you from the dawn of your days till the close. You owe yourselves to Him. Pay what you owe. Give yourselves to Him, and thus be placed in moral credit for the full and fair discharge of every other due.

Godliness, then, as we have seen, is equivalent to a debt due from the creature to the Creator, from the children of earth to their Father in heaven. This is, however, only one aspect of it. It is not merely the moral result of something rendered, but also of something received. It is not a one-sided

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relation. The relations between the human and the divine are mutual, and the obligations are mutual also. God is not merely a receiver ; He is a bestower. Indeed, He is for ever seeking methods of self-impartation to His creatures. If He requires us to seek first the kingdom of God, He Himself is always seeking first the kingdom of man. He makes His demands upon us that through our response He may open up communication with our consciousness, and thus bless and enrich our lives.

Now, godliness is the issue and result in human character of this mutual correspondence. It is not a single, but a double line of communication, along which there runs from man to God a continuous current of holy desire, and from God to man a perpetual flow of redeeming, recovering, and morally reinforcing power. Through the medium of this sustained correspondence God imparts Himself to us, and thus fits us for the battle and burden of our life.

Between the godly man and God there is thus an endless cycle of interchange. Deep is for ever calling unto deep—the deep of infinite supply answering to the deep of our almost infinite need : the cry of the human met by the response of the divine. Ungodliness, therefore, like godliness, works both ways. It is subjective as well as objective in its effects. De-

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clining to render to God the things that are God's, it fails to receive from God the things that are man's. The effect is disastrous but disciplinary.

The reflex result of moral default is moral shrinkage. It is only as human life is rightly related to the divine that it can become and achieve its best. You might as well expect a vine to come to perfection of growth, and crown itself with amber or purple clusters, without striking its roots into the soil, as expect a life to unfold into fragrance and fruit when out of relation to God.

Here, then, is the connexion between righteousness and godliness; it is that of tree to soil. All human relations, to be kept free and vigorous, must run back and root themselves in the ground of godliness. That is the only soil that can sustain them. Righteousness—in the sense of everyday rightness towards men—can spring only out of godliness, which is rightness towards God. The vital relation between them is clearly set forth in the first Psalm, where the godly man is likened to a tree planted by the rivers of waters. If this means anything, it is that apart from godliness we shall default in mere manliness, just as a tree apart from the soil must default in fruit.

It may be said, however, that the fruit of righteousness, in the shape of honour, rectitude,

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and straightforwardness, is seen in lives lived aloof from God. Now, God forbid that we should discount goodness or purity wherever they may appear. But there are thousands of men who are godless themselves, yet are nevertheless the heirs of a godly line of ancestors. Their high conscientiousness is the product of forces generated a century, it may be, before they were born. They have come into a moral inheritance which they never did a hand's turn to gain. Other men laboured, and they have entered into the possession of their moral harvests. They have breathed from their birth an atmosphere charged with moral oxygen, and they themselves are the product of forces whose very existence they now oppose or deny. They are simply wasters, and the spenders of moral capital they did nothing to acquire. In thus cutting themselves off from God, the fount and source of all abiding rectitude, they therefore not only do not add to, but they subtract from, their moral energy. They reduce their morality to a spent force, and destroy its reproductive power.

Last season one of the writer's lads, in climbing the fig-tree after fruit, broke one of the branches, so that it merely hung by a few tenacious fibres. It was loaded with unripe figs, but it carried enough sap in itself, together with the little that

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came along the damaged tissues, to bring its fruit to a slow and half-flavoured ripeness. Now, that almost severed branch might as well have pointed boastfully to its clusters of belated fruit as proof of its independence of the tree, as a godless man to his honour and rectitude in proof that morality is independent of religion. The fact is, there is enough inherited moral sap in many irreligious men to keep their honour from decay. But, I repeat, it is a spent force. It has no resources upon which to draw for reinforcement, and its possession can hardly be placed to the moral credit of its owner, inasmuch as, being solely an inheritance, it has not come in through the gateway of his choice.

Look at the question from another point of view. If I am told that honour, truth, and straightforwardness can be seen in lives divorced from religion, and that this proves religion is not essential to morality, I reply that I have seen a lovely flower amid the reeking fumes of a gold-mine 2,000 feet below the surface of the earth. But it did not grow there! It had been plucked from the miner's garden that stretched beneath the open heavens and drank the sunshine and the rains. Moreover, it could not long survive removal to those dark and dreary depths. And so with the morality of irreligion. It is a plucked flower. It never grew in irreligious soil.

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It is the product of another sphere, the perishing witness to the tender and gracious light of a day that is dead.

Here, then, we place our finger unerringly on the cause of unrighteousness. It is ungodliness. The relation between these two is severely and inexorably logical. Every failure in the fulfilment of relations towards men finds its all-sufficient explanation in failure towards God. I am not surprised at men breaking down morally who are living without God. The marvel to me is that they are as good as they are. I know what frequent and liberal draughts I have to make on the divine strength to keep up the struggle against evil and maintain the moral balance of my life. And were it not for the grace of God, I can assure my readers that with all the start some of them may have on the downward way, I could get to the devil quicker than most if left to myself. From my knowledge of myself and of human nature generally, I say it is impossible to live righteously apart from godliness in the heart.

But suppose that it were not. Suppose that independently of religion a man might discharge all his earthly obligations, how would that liquidate his liabilities towards God? Narrow the whole issue down to a question of common honesty. There is nothing about which some men are more sensitive

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than their honesty. But, then, men are honest either from principle or policy. To be honest from principle means such a love and reverence for the principle that no consideration whatever can swerve the will from rectitude. It is supreme and unquestioning loyalty to the source of the principle, which is the personal God. Men have loose ways of talking about principles. But the word 'principle' is rooted in the word 'principal,' which means Ruler, and Source of all authority and law. The seat of principle is found, therefore, in a person from whom it is derived, and apart from whom it cannot be conceived. Again, nothing can be properly called a principle against which any desire for personal profit or any fear of personal pain can be successfully weighed. A principle holds on its undeviating way at all hazards and at every cost. It is as uncompromising as the law of gravitation. It is no respecter of persons. It takes no account of latitude or longitude. It is indifferent alike to time or place, to number or weight or size.

Here, then, is a simple test which any one may apply: Is there in our relation to any person, place, or thing, any point where our honesty breaks or bends? If so, then it is not a principle, but a policy; and the difference between a principle and a policy is the difference between a man of honour and a

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man who simply has his price. But men who have not squared accounts with God have broken down in honesty, and can be impeached on this single count. They have failed in the matter of common honesty and in a relation of the first degree. What guarantee is there that, given an adequate consideration, they will behave any better in a relation of the second or third degree? Is not the presumption fair that if they have broken down in honesty to the Highest, it is merely a question of opportunity and expediency as to when they will fail all along the line?

Here, for example, is a fellow clerk in the house where you are employed, whom you know to be dishonest towards the firm and a picker-up of unconsidered trifles that happen to come within his reach. Is he a man that you would trust with the negotiation of your own affairs? It would be in vain for him to protest that he only robbed his employers, but always had a most delicate sense of what was due to his fellow employés. You would be exceedingly dubious of an honesty which, instead of being rooted in a great principle which knew no respect of persons, was thus an adjustable quantity and capable of modification and suspense.

The wrath of God burns against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who ~~thus~~ hold down the

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truth, as you might hold down a throttled man, in unrighteousness. Sin and penalty stand related. ^{We} You cannot sow to the flesh and then skip off and turn ^{your} backs on the harvest of corruption. Sooner or later, here or there, ^{you} must thrust in the sickle and reap the black harvest of death. It is true that God is love, but, as I have sought to show you, His love is made manifest in thus permitting us to pluck the bitter fruit of our own bad planting, that, if need be, even through pain and tears and loss, we may yet be led to fall in love with holiness and for ever break with sin.

XVIII

The Suspense of Power

Tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.—LUKE xxiv. 49.

Why could not we cast him out? . . . Because of your unbelief. . . . Howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.—MATT. xvii. 20, 21.

THE problem as to why the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was delayed until so late in the world's history is not so simple as it might appear. There were doubtless reasons springing out of the deep and mysterious relations subsisting between the Father, Son, and Spirit, on which it were vain, even were it permissible, for us to speculate; for these are secret places veiled from human gaze, sacred places whose sanctities we refrain from seeking to invade. But there are other reasons lying within the compass of legitimate speculation, and springing out of the very nature of the case. One of these is to be found in the fact that Christ's purpose was not to leave a number of separate and unrelated units to represent Him in the world.

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Had that been His plan, there would have existed no necessity for their tarrying. Each disciple, after the Ascension, might have received his baptism and gone forth alone to bear his witness to his Lord. But Christ desired to leave an organized body, a corporate society which He called His Church, and which was to be the instrument of the new kingdom He had come to establish. Assuming that after the Resurrection the relation of each disciple to the Lord Himself was all that could be desired, their relation to one another had not yet reached its perfect adjustment. This is clear from the first chapter of the Acts. They are represented as still hankering after power. But it is power political, not spiritual—power to subjugate the world by military force to the dominion of the rising faith. It is not the kingdom about which they are so much concerned, as their place in it. Thus it comes to pass that they must wait, because all excessive individualism, all mutual jealousies, rivalries, and competitions, required to be subordinated to the corporate ideal. If they are to work together as a body, then they must be mutually reciprocal in their action. Each must make his contribution to the working of the organism, but must so subordinate himself as to subserve the effective working of the whole. But such harmonious result cannot be achieved without adjustment, and

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adjustment of this kind means time and association. An illustration of this principle may be gathered from the sphere of applied mechanics. Let us suppose that a locomotive is in course of construction at one of our foundries. We pass into the shops during the process, and find the various parts distributed through the different departments. Here is a piece beneath the steam-hammer, yonder a part in the grip of the planing machine, still farther a portion in a lathe, and so on throughout the whole area of the works the various parts of that engine are scattered. Each part, however, is being shaped not as an end in itself, but as a means to a great corporate end which requires to be served. By-and-by there comes a time when the scattered parts are brought together into the fitting-chamber. 'They are all with one accord in one place.' They are to be organized into a corporate entity. The erectors get to work, part is brought to part, and presently the locomotive stands in its organized completeness. Before it can be baptized with power, however, for the work it has to do, the greatest care must be taken that all the parts are in right relation. This adjustment is a work of considerable delicacy. There must be beautiful and frictionless movement before it would be safe to baptize an engine with steam power; for, as every one can see, friction would mean heat, and

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heat would mean expansion, and expansion would mean disaster. Hence it is that time and care have to be taken, and the locomotive must tarry in the hands of these finishers for its baptism of power. Here we have an illustration of one principle at least on which the endowment of power was suspended in the case of the disciples. The upper room was the fitting-chamber where these first disciples were adjusted in their relations to one another, and it was not till this adjustment had been effected that the power could be bestowed. When, however, they were mutually reciprocal and accordant, each for the other and all for God, the promise was fulfilled that made them into a mighty engine for the pulling down of strongholds and the building up of the city of God. As to whether the appointment of a successor to Judas was a necessary part of this preparation, as Peter thought, we cannot say. There are those who regard the election of Matthias as an altogether irregular proceeding, the outcome of Peter's impulsiveness. As a proof of the divine disapproval, they point to the fact that his name never emerges again in the apostolic records. Too much, however, must not be made of this. It is equally true of several of the other apostles, but it would be an altogether unwarrantable conclusion that their work did not count

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for its true value in the promotion of the kingdom because it was without report or display. Much of the best work of the world never finds its way into the records of men. Silent and unobtrusive forces streaming forth from lives behind which God sits enthroned are working out their beneficent purpose in history ; and by-and-by it will be found that many a nameless and fameless follower of the Saviour has been successful in achieving results which will outlast the stars. It is what we are, rather than what we do, that counts among the moral facts and forces of our time. Character is the supreme force of the universe, and we ourselves must be better than any piece of work that we can hope to do.

Now, if what we have said as to the necessity for mutual adjustment be correct, does it not suggest one reason, at least, why so many prayers for power on the part of the Church to-day are unproductive of results? Is it not due to the fact that sufficient attention has not been given to the corporate ideal in church life and the obligations it involves? How many rivalries and misunderstandings, cliques, piques, and jealousies divide the Church of Christ! Where these things exist, prayer for spiritual power is not only useless, but profane. Mutual love and forbearance, perfect reciprocity, and self-subordination to the corporate conception must precede any bestowal

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of spiritual blessing. There is nothing haphazard or capricious in the administration of the spiritual realm any more than in that of the physical. They are both administered according to law. The forces of the physical world do not act blindly 'without a conscience or an aim.' They are always consistent. The unexpected never happens. The same thing always takes place under similar conditions, and, given the same circumstances, we may confidently predict the same result. This is the basis of all physical science. Why, then, should it be thought that the spiritual world must be handed over to lawlessness and caprice? Why should its forces behave erratically? If there be a science of spiritual dynamics, then the facts and forces of that sphere must be marshalled under laws as steadfast and undeviating as any that control the elements that we touch and see. Here lies the answer to the question as to how it is that after nineteen centuries of active work, Christianity is not yet a universal faith. It is not that the forces of the spiritual order are either spent or unavailable, but that they are simply 'hung up' through human delinquency or default. The conditions of their bestowal have not been fulfilled, and until they are, we can pray till doomsday and receive no more answer to our prayers than the echo of our own

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empty and impotent cry. We need to transfer some of our common-sense methods from our every-day concerns into our negotiations with God. We require to 'prepare the way of the Lord' before we can expect His coming. It is here that the work of mutual adjustment and harmonization comes in. Are we cherishing animosities against one another? Are there positive barriers to be removed, or negative chasms to be bridged? Has our brother aught against us that we could put right by a frank apology or an explaining word? Then let us get at once to this task, that we may all with 'one accord,' and with all the human conditions fulfilled, successfully seek the baptism of power. It is spiritual power the Church needs, not a more elaborate ritual or a more complex organization, but simply driving-power. This will supply her with the all-sufficient vindication of her right to exist and her claim to support. Ours is an exceedingly practical age; and wherever it sees expenditure of money or force, it requires to be assured that it is justified by results. Machinery as machinery may be very interesting from some points of view, but as an end in itself could hardly justify its erection and maintenance. Imagine some one being shown over a large woollen mill, and upon inquiry as to what end the complicated system had been established, being informed that it

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was simply for the sake of filling the eye with the sight of revolving wheels in beautiful relation, and the ear with the clash of empty and purposeless shuttles flashing to and fro! What inducement would such an explanation offer for the investment of capital and the purchase of shares? Let the visitor, however, be shown at one end of the establishment a heap of soiled and malodorous wool, and be told that these mills are a system for taking hold of and cleansing this stained and greasy material, and, by elaborate processes through many hands, delivering it at the other end woven into fabric fit for a prince's raiment, and he is content, and finds an ample vindication for all this expenditure of money and of force. So with the Church of God. If it be an establishment simply run for the purpose of sustaining an ecclesiastical system, which is an end in itself, then men will become impatient, and exclaim, 'To what purpose is this waste?' But let them see the Church laying hold of human lives, stained and disfigured by sin, and changing them into characters fit to associate with Jesus' priests and kings—let them see the Church grappling with the problems of human misery and shame, and lifting the race from moral degradation and despair to those 'shining tablelands, to which our God Himself is moon and sun,' and they will cry, 'It is enough;

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this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.' This is the supreme and unanswerable apologetic of the Christian faith—a changed life, a renewed character, a child of man transformed into a child of God.

Still another reason for the suspense of power is suggested by the second text which we have placed above. It is a reason arising out of the fact that to generate or bestow power before it can be utilized is to run it to waste ; and God is ever the conserver of energy. Given power on the one hand, and work to be done on the other, the problem is to effect a junction between the two. This is the difficulty in the case of tidal power. Scientific men assure us that there is energy enough and to spare in the rising and falling tides to drive all our machinery, to light all our cities, to warm all our houses, cook all our dinners, and, in short, do all the work of the world. But no one has yet solved the problem of storing this energy and delivering it in payable quantities as a working force. Once that solution is discovered, the sea will work for us night and day without stint or weariness. All that is needed is the connecting link. It is not power of which we are short, then, but couplings. It does not matter how much power may be generated in the boiler of a locomotive ; unless it can be hitched up

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to the dead-weight of trucks and carriages they will remain at a standstill. Herein lies the importance of Christ's Ascension in the system of human redemption. It made available the power by which alone the work could be effected which required to be done. It completed, if you will, the electric circuit. From the day of Pentecost that power has been everywhere accessible as a working force, a moral dynamic for the uplift of man. Then you ask, 'How is it that the disciples of Christ to-day stand so often confounded as did those of the earlier time by the problems of human sin and shame?' In the light of the incident from which the second text is chosen, the answer is not far to seek. The clear teaching of that story is that power has its price. Here we strike a universal principle, holding good of all classes of power in all realms. Just look at it for a moment, and see how all-embracing is this law. Let us suppose you are bent on acquiring mere muscular power—the power of the athlete. You desire to excel in sport, to climb high mountains, to swim broad rivers, to negotiate long journeys without fatigue. Then you will speedily discover that this power has its price; and any athlete will tell you how rigorously it is demanded, and how scrupulously it must be paid, for the privilege of keeping 'in form.' Think, too, of the

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price men have to pay for mental power—the power to elucidate great questions, to solve intricate problems, to make great generalizations, to conduct investigations in science, to push behind the veil of the visible and find the law within the law! Truly the pathway to the temple of knowledge leads over the graves of thousands who have willingly sacrificed their lives in pushing their inquiries after truth. Mental power has its price, and he who would possess must pay. The same has to be said of social and political power. You cannot acquire influence and become the centres of radiant force in the circles of your human relations unless you pay the price; and those who occupy the thrones and chairs of civil power could tell a tale of heavy prices paid, even of honour sacrificed, to grasp the coveted position and control the destinies of State. Power everywhere has its price. When you step on a tramcar and hand over your penny, that penny represents a pennyworth of horse-power. No penny, no power—at least not in the direction desired. Your railway ticket represents the purchase of so much steam-power, which is measured off and checked by guards, porters, and station-masters all along the line of travel, to see that you do not get a single ounce of power beyond that for which you have paid. Hydraulic power, electric power, it is

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all the same; there are no exceptions. Each and every kind has to be paid for either in cash or some equivalent. It is a system of exchange of what you have for what you have not. Even the forces of nature, such as wind and water, that appear to be without money and without price, exact certain toll of time and ingenuity before they will consent to utilization and direction into reproductive fields. Indeed, the wheeling seasons will not serve us excepting as we plough and sow. But conversely, all tools for work and all weapons for war lie ready to the hand that holds the price. The very stars in their courses fight the battles of those who are prepared to pay the cost of power.

Now, it would indeed be strange if the highest Power of all proved an exception to this rule, and were unconditionally bestowed. If there is one truth written more legibly than another across the page of the world's moral history it is this—that there is nothing capricious or haphazard in the administration of the spiritual realm. Its forces are as rigidly under law as those of the physical world. Power here, as elsewhere, waits on fulfilled conditions. What are the conditions which were violated at the foot of Hermon, and thus covered the disciples with defeat, but which were fulfilled in the upper room, and clothed them with irresistible power? As-

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stated by Christ, they are three—faith, prayer, fasting ; and these three, when rightly understood, resolve themselves into one. They are all manifestations of the selfsame thing, but expressing itself in different forms. With regard to faith and prayer, so much has been said and written that we need not dwell upon them here. But as to fasting, let it be said that, as a mere mechanical exercise, it is simply worse than useless. The fasting that is to be effective must be the issue and effect of prayer. It must be the abstinence that comes of devotional absorption. We all know how, when the mind is absorbed, food is forgotten and ignored. This, then, is the condition : such an intensity of desire as will draw the whole life after it in an ascending flame of eager expectancy, so that hunger and thirst are as though they were not. This is the coupling condition which, once established, will gird the soul with strength and courage to fight the battles of God. Let us seek it and we shall find ; and those who know us best will marvel at the force that we have made our own, and glorify God who has given such power unto men.

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